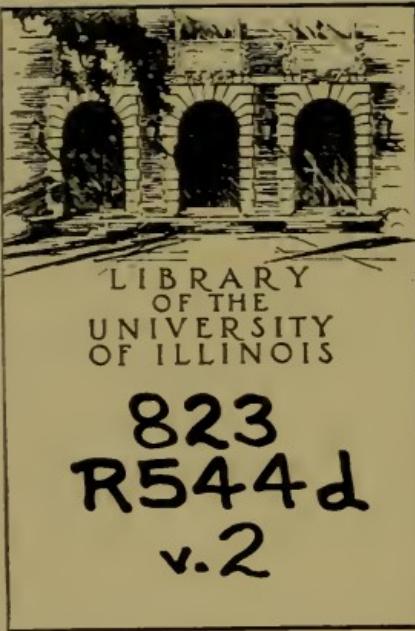


ISABEL SMITH
HER BOOK





D E N N I S E.

I N T W O V O L S.

VOL. II.



D E N I S E.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "MADEMOISELLE MORL"

"Wait, my faith is large in time
And that which brings it to a perfect end."

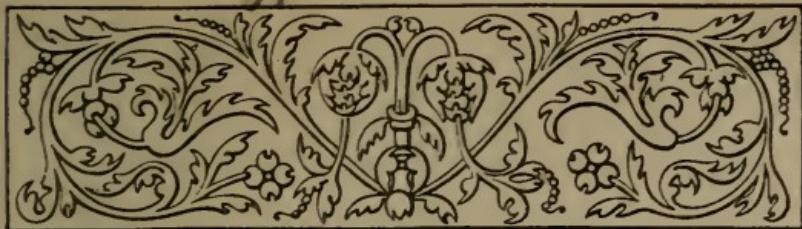
TENNYSON.

VOLUME II.



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1863.



DENISE.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HIS all comes of letting a girl remain unmarried after she is out of her teens!" was the reflection of M. de Farnoux, as he departed. "Why could not Eleanor have found her a husband before! Félide, poor thing, was not fortunate; but, after all, a girl once married—the rest concerns the husband. We ought to have convents like the Papists, and then one would know what to do with unmarried women. Poor Géraldine! so she used to speak of me! I dare say it was Eleanor's fault that she ran away; shut up with Eleanor—hem!—and I was away. All goes wrong when the master's eye is wanting."

M. de Farnoux had contrived to forget that where Mlle. de Farnoux had been, there was no master but herself.

“That virago!” continued he, thinking of Mlle. Le Marchand, “worse than a harem of wives! I really think she might have been a match for Eleanor. An old Jacobin, without a grain of right feeling. What a day I have passed! and all owing to Eleanor’s mismanagement; and so I should certainly tell her plainly, only it would be cruel in her present state.”

He little knew, as he thus valiantly discoursed with himself, that an opportunity of showing his courage was awaiting him. Had he known it, instead of returning home, he would have probably fled far enough from the Château. He mounted the toilsome path wearily, looking an older man than when he descended it so hastily in the morning.

It had been a day of events at the Château. Mme. de Farnoux was pondering over a letter from a brother who had made a very fair fortune at Marseilles—(Farnoux would have called the fortune “colossal”—by speculating in oils, wines, and lemons. He had written to propose his son as a candidate for the hand of the pretty Lucile. Mme. de Farnoux knew wherefore he desired this penniless niece as a daughter-in-law. Young Auguste had already accumulated debts to the amount of many thousand francs; had spent the year in Paris, where he had been sent to study, in

acquiring every kind of knowledge that was not desirable, and none that was desirable, and, since his father had ordered him home, had continued a career so far from creditable, that at last M. Luchon had determined he should marry, believing that this would assuredly reform him. But the son did not wish to be reformed. Life was so agreeable already ; why burden himself with the yoke of matrimony ? No one whom M. Luchon selected could fascinate this burdensome son, whose conduct scandalized the father as much as if it had not been his own early history over again. At last, in his despair at finding his son so vigorously *chasser de race*, he thought of Lucile, whose beauty had once charmed her cousin, but M. Luchon took prompt measures then to prevent this vehement admiration from going any further. Now he had altered his mind.

Mme. de Farnoux knew all this. She did not hesitate because her nephew was a very pillar of support to the tavern, a coarse and violent man, and a gambler. She quite believed, like her brother, that some day he would settle down into a keen man of business, and double the fortune he would inherit. She would not have hesitated one moment to give him her only child, and confide to him the future of an innocent girl of seventeen ; but there was a weight in the other scale. She had been ambitious from her earliest days, ever since

her school experiences taught her the value of a title in the eyes of the world. One of her school-fellows had married nobly, and taken the first opportunity of slighting her late particular friend, Mlle. Luchon, who never forgot it, looked at herself in the glass, and resolved that her beauty should make her at least a marquise. But M. Gautier appeared, backed by her parents' authority. She obeyed, and was rewarded by early widowhood. M. Gautier died poor, and she was thankful to find a home with a brother, a prosperous notary in Paris. M. de Farnoux was then at Paris too, very poor, very fond of cards, and very glad to get a dinner, whenever he could, without paying for it. He happened to make the acquaintance of M. Emile Luchon, and received important assistance from him in the business which had brought him to Paris. The Baron did not offer any payment, but was very affable towards him and his handsome sister, Mme. Gautier, who was enraptured at the approach of this noble prey within reach of her net. However, the idea of marrying her would never have entered his aristocratic brain, had not fortune aided and abetted her designs. M. de Farnoux had no luck at cards, yet could never keep his hands off them. M. Luchon was equally fond of them, but a great deal more fortunate, and in a respectful way he won a good deal from his noble

client. He also lent him various sums from time to time, which were never repaid. This state of things suited neither the purse nor honour of the Baron, and he was quite grateful when Mme. Gautier came to the rescue. M. Luchon was thinking of getting married, and wanted to be quit of his sister and her child, and was contented to let the debts rest on the condition of her marriage with the Baron. She contrived to have M. de Farnoux informed of it; he shrank a good deal from the prospect, but finally gave in, and when she was exulting in her future rank, did not think it necessary to inform her he should not dare to take her to Farnoux. For there, at that time, reigned his terrible sister.

The alliance would not, after all, have been very scandalous, for the Luchons were well known and respected; and no one really believed that Mme. de Farnoux had been a *marchande de modes*, only he was so ashamed of the marriage himself that every one took their tone from him. When he brought her home at last, after years of needy existence in Paris, the poor woman found herself quite isolated. The aristocratic circle that she pined to enter was closed against her. No one but herself knew what she imagined that fairy-land to be like; it was the Paradise from which she was excluded, and nothing could have convinced her that, after all, it

was a very dull circle indeed, not half as gay and diverting as the good bourgeois set whom she had known at Paris. Her title was, however, some compensation to her; it even almost made up for the monotonous life of Château Farnoux, and the society of a miserly husband. And as he was fast growing old, while she was comparatively young, her mirror lent her philosophy to wait patiently till she could return to Paris free, and accompanied by a noble son-in-law. When, in the early days of her second marriage, she was longing for her Provençal castle, she had been far-sighted enough to make Gaston very welcome at all times. The noble nephew-in-law was a visible proof that she too was now noble; and if he would but marry Lucile, the name of Gautier would become altogether extinct. Besides, she really was delighted to make any one comfortable and happy, if it did not inconvenience herself. Everybody allowed her to be a very good-natured woman. Gaston was well pleased to have some resort, where every one received him warmly. Lucile was then a charming little child; and he was very affectionate and courteous to his new aunt. After his school-days, he remained in Paris to study law, not with a view to living by it, but as a part of his education. The extent of his father's debts was not yet known. Thus Lucile had been devoted to Gaston from childhood, and looked on his

comings and goings as the great events of her life. He too loved Lucile as deeply as Mme. de Farnoux could wish; all the deeper that it was in defiance of his family pride and the prejudices of his caste. But by and bye it appeared that his father had contrived, before his death, to spend every sou that he possessed. Consequently Gaston found himself dependent on his uncle, who gave him to understand that Lucile was no wife for him. There was a sort of armed truce between them on this matter; both avoided touching on it. Mme. de Farnoux did not like this delay; Gaston was not even distinctly pledged to Lucile, and she pondered much on M. Luchon's offer. Finally she determined to wait awhile ere she replied to it, and keep the matter secret, lest Gaston's pride should start at the idea of a plebeian rival in his path.

Lucile, all unconscious that her fate was trembling in the balance, was full of other anxieties. Georges had not felt himself so bound to discretion by his master's liberality, as not to tell the story of the picture to his fellow-servants. None had lived long enough at the Château to recollect that a Le Marchand had once been the Farnoux *intendant*; all they comprehended was that this mysterious portrait had thrown their master into an unprecedented state of agitation, and caused him to set off instantly for the town. He had meant to lock his door, but in

his hurry he did not observe that the bolt had shot without acting as a fastening. Georges did not think it needful to make any remark, and very soon after his master was seen to have left the Château, all the domestics were in the library, examining and discussing the portrait with lively interest; but, as none could read, they only saw that there was an inscription which might clear up all their perplexities, could they but decipher it. Nina suggested that Lucile would tell them what it meant; the proposal was hailed with acclamations, but presently she returned crest-fallen. Mlle. Lucile said she dared not venture into the Baron's library without his leave; and, moreover, Mlle. de Farnoux was ringing her bell, and it must be attended to. "And if she asks me what news there is to-day, I shall have something to tell her," said she. "I can't imagine what makes her always asking that now-a-days—as if there ever were any news in this old place up in the skies!"

Though Lucile had refused Nina's solicitations, she had a perilous longing to see the likeness of the young girl, whom, Marcellin Duval said, Gaston had admired. For the servants all thought the portrait meant for Denise. Lucile had often pondered about her lately, wished she had observed her more narrowly, and wondered why Gaston never mentioned her. And why was this likeness

come here? She waited till the servants had gone their ways, and then, with a beating heart, stole into the library, where she had never been before. Fearing lest the Baron should return and find her, she listened to each noise like a startled fawn, but when she saw the portrait she forgot her terrors in earnest contemplation. The inscription simply bewildered her; she had never heard of Géraldine, and was above all occupied in studying the face which she took to be that of Denise, though its sad, wistful expression was most unlike the serene thoughtfulness of Denise's countenance. The sound of steps behind her frightened her out of her reverie. She looked round, with guilty alarm, and saw, not the stooping, withered form of the Baron, but the tall figure of one whose very name always scared her—Mlle. de Farnoux.

Never before had Lucile beheld her; never would she even have had courage to pass her bed-room door. She held Mlle. de Farnoux in childish awe, regarding her, whether as insane or imbecile, with the greatest terror, feeling every room in the Château haunted by her, and trembling in her bed at night when she thought of her. And now she, all alone, found herself in this awful presence. She shrank to one side, her hands pressed together, her eyes wide open with alarm, gazing at the object of her fears, as she came in with slow, difficult steps, lean-

ing on her stick. Her face was flushed with the exertion of what was to her a long and toilsome journey, from her distant part of the Château, and there was a fierce light in the eyes, that looked straight before her, never glancing right or left. She paid no attention to the terrified girl, but came opposite the portrait, and stood looking down from her stately height upon it. She knew well enough for whom it was intended. Obscured as her intelligence was on things of the present, there were those in the past on which it was vivid as ever. Her looks grew so inexorably fierce, that the excess of Lucile's terror was more than excusable.

"So you have brought back your shame from the grave!" said she, as if she were challenging a living being.

Her voice completed Lucile's consternation. With a shriek, snatching courage from despair, she flew past Mlle. de Farnoux, darted out of the room like a bird, not even seeing the Baron, who was just returned, and struggled wildly when some one caught her, and demanded what had frightened her.

"Lucile! What is it? Do you not know me?"

"O, Gaston! is it you? is it you? Oh, take care of me!"

"What has frightened you?"

"Oh," she said, now venturing to raise her face from his breast, as if his voice had full assurance of protection in it, "I am not afraid now."

"So it seems, sweet one! Sit down, you cannot stand. Who has dared to alarm you in this way?"

"Not here. I cannot stay here. Oh, she might come!" and she started up and struggled again to escape.

"No one can hurt you where I am. Tell me what all this means."

"Yes . . . O, Gaston! I thought she never left her room! How shall I ever live in the Château now? Oh, never go away, cousin, or take me with you!"

"I have not heard what alarmed you?" he said, with his brief smile.

"She—Mlle. de Farnoux—came—where I was."

"My aunt? Out of her apartment?"

"I thought—O, Gaston! if you knew what I felt, when I turned round and saw her there!"

"Foolish child!" he said, in the tone of tenderness which his voice always took in speaking to her, "do you think that any one belonging to me would harm you?"

"I wish she were not your aunt, Gaston! I fear her so much, and I do not like fearing any one you care for. Can you really love her?"

“ You are needlessly afraid. You fancy her insane, but she is not. At times she is almost imbecile, which is a very different thing. There are strange flashes of intelligence; for the time she seems completely herself, but I notice that they leave her doubly weak and apathetic afterwards. The servants are foolishly afraid of her at such times.”

“ Oh, I have heard such stories of her temper ! Of things she did and said—”

“ Yes, she has left an awful impression on her acquaintances ; but where could you have heard such tales ? These servants are new-comers.”

“ Oh, they have heard such things from people in the town—And even now Nina hardly dares come near her, when she is angry !”

“ The old temper breaks out at times, but I can always calm her.”

“ Gaston, why do you care for her ?”

“ I am glad to have the power of cheering so sad an existence, and she loves me.”

“ But you know—she was so cruel to your mother !”

“ We will let that rest, Lucile.”

“ O, Gaston ! you are angry with me.”

“ Not in the least, but I cannot talk on that subject.”

“ You did, once—don’t you remember ? that

night when the wind sighed so, and you said it reminded you of the pine-woods sighing round La Pinède. And then you told me a great deal about your mother, but you never have since."

"A man may be in the mood, once in a way, to tell what he would have very little inclination to speak of at another time."

"Yes—but I cannot help thinking you must have liked me better that night than you do now, cousin. I should like to hear some more."

"You think you have only to say 'Play!' as the giant did to his magic harp, and the air you want will sound? Instead, tell me where you saw my aunt. I can perceive that you are not really re-assured. Will you not come with me and judge for yourself? I am sure you could please and enliven her, if you would try."

"Gaston! you are cruel! I dare not! Do not say I must go!"

"I have no right to say it. There is no need for tears."

"You are vexed! If you really say I must—I will try," she murmured, so like a docile, frightened child, that he stooped and kissed her, just as he had done years before, when he was her tall cousin, and she little Lucile.

"Then I need not go? Ah, that is my own kind Gaston again!" cried she. "You are really

not angry? Now, Gaston, have you been writing to-day?"

He smiled, and showed her a manuscript that he had laid down while talking.

"But you cannot hear it now, my child, for Mme. de Farnoux was asking for you."

"Then I must go, I suppose," said Lucile, with clouded looks. "I wonder she has not come to seek me."

But there was no need, for Mme. de Farnoux knew perfectly well where her daughter was. She had been in a room whose door was ajar, close by, during the whole conversation, feigning, lest some one should look in, to be occupied in arranging a great wardrobe. Gaston wasted much gratitude when he mentally thanked his aunt for trusting him so often with Lucile unwatched.



CHAPTER XIX.



HE headlong flight of Lucile had started M. de Farnoux into a conviction that she had been in his library. Yet the key was in his pocket. An exclamation of anger escaped him as he saw the open door. He hurried forward, then staggered like one who has had a sudden blow. For very good reasons he had a profound dread of his sister.

And there she was, seated, as if keeping watch and ward over the picture, whose sad eyes seemed to seek and follow the Baron.

“So! you are come at last!” said she, hoarsely.
“And where is the other?”

“What other?”

“Félide. We want her to make us complete.
How comes this here?”

“I assure you, sister, I had nothing to do with it. It was sent unknown to me.”

“Did you ever know anything that our honour required you should know?”

“If you had informed me of certain circum-

stances before," replied M. de Farnoux, divided between peevish vexation and habitual submission, "I should have better known how to act."

"Act! Was there no fire to burn, no well down which to throw this thing? Act! Did you ever know how to act in your life?"

"If you will listen," said M. de Farnoux, quickly, "you will find that I have acted, and taken prompt measures to secure our secret being kept. I have seen that Mlle. Le Marchand——"

"Yes—well?—well?"

"She is not an easy person to deal with, but I represented my view of the affair strongly; I put it forcibly before her——"

"I daresay. Go on."

The Baron winced under the utter contempt of her tone, but obeyed.

"I explained that she could not possibly be allowed to live in Farnoux; that I could not permit such a thing, and that it would also be for her advantage to go. Her niece—there is a niece, Eleanor."

"I know it. I have seen her. Go on."

"Seen her?" began M. de Farnoux, but, alarmed by his sister's impatient gesture, he continued in haste. "The aunt is a very eccentric person; not so respectful as she certainly ought to be; but I think, Eleanor, I think she could not help feeling

the force of what I said. I have no doubt she will go elsewhere, and in that case I have promised to add to the girl's dowry."

M. de Farnoux paused complacently, much pleased at having proved he could act readily and decisively, and awaited his sister's approbation.

"Well—well—what else?"

"What else?"

"Yes, yes, what else did you offer to buy her silence?"

"Offer? Why, I have explained to you. I argued with her, and offered to find the girl an honest bourgeois for a husband, say at Marseilles, who——"

"I know you there!" said Mme. de Farnoux, with a scorn that words cannot express. "I recognise your admirable expedients! Are you indeed such an utter fool as to believe that woman will accept such terms, when she holds us all in her power, and can dictate what she pleases?"

"What should I have done?" asked the Baron, peevishly.

"Done! Offered her anything we possess—bade her take fortune, lands; anything, so long as she pledged herself to silence!"

"As for that, it would have made at least as much scandal to resign the Château to her, as anything she can say," said the Baron, with reason.

“And, however disgraceful an elopement may be, the man is dead, and Géraldine too——”

“The girl!” cried Mlle. de Farnoux. “She belongs to us—our own blood! Are we to have a new *mésalliance* there, too? And, listen, not only will some low-born Farnousien boast of his alliance with the De Farnoux, but all the country-side will ring with the story how Mlle. de Farnoux schemed and lied, to hide that her sister ran off with the steward! Such a discovery would be a thousand times worse now than if it had been made then!”

“They were married at Toulon,” said the Baron, hurriedly.

“I know it, but I have reason to believe that in their haste the civil ceremony was never performed. They might look on it as a marriage, and that idiot of a pastor might do the same—who else would? He thought himself still in ‘the Desert’—poor man!”

“Are you sure of this?”

“Nearly so. In any case, think of the scandal! Think of what gossip would add, and how our neighbours would sneer at the Protestant family, which disgraced itself in *both* the daughters! Oh, if I could strangle them all—silence all their gibing tongues! If I had them here!”

“I am sure I am truly thankful ‘they’—whoever they may be—are a long way off!” muttered

the Baron, casting a look of consternation on his sister, who, however, had now sunk back exhausted, the fire in her eyes dying out.

“I wish you had let me know all this. I must say, too, that a daughter of our house should not have been left to starve,” he added presently, looking at the portrait with sorrow.

“She was dead to us from the moment she left this house. A little sooner, a little later could not matter.”

“I don’t think they would have said so... If I had been at home——”

“No doubt you would have managed admirably.”

“I could not have managed worse,” said M. de Farnoux, stung into momentary courage. “Félice—Géraldine—you have not much to boast of, yourself.”

He repented his sudden audacity, for she kindled in an instant.

“And where were you? Where were you, M. de Farnoux? Do you dare to reproach me, you for whom I sacrificed my future, my happiness? who caused me to be a desolate woman, instead of a happy wife! Do you remember there was one who loved me—loved me? gave me all his heart? Bah! you cannot understand what such words mean. My wedding-day was fixed, M. de Farnoux, when I learnt that you, absent in Paris,

were about to contract a low marriage to pay your debts. You know if I hesitated. I gave him up ; I could not tell a secret that touched my brother's honour. I sought you out, gave up my dowry to pay those debts, and you looked on, and left me to learn, too late, that you were already married ! Since then—since then ! Oh, what a life ! I only saw him to say that we must part, and so we did, no reason given. He was angry, and we never met again. I watch, but he does not come."

The last words were spoken in the inward, imperfect accents that were habitual to her, as if she had returned to a familiar train of thought, and had forgotten all else. M. de Farnoux stood like a criminal, but rather in impatience than remorse. He had not force of mind enough to repent. He had always known what she had just said, and her passionate outpouring annoyed rather than touched him.

" All that you say is true," he answered at last ; " but it is nothing to the present purpose. This girl —what do you propose doing with her ? "

Mlle. de Farnoux must have had a mighty influence over him once, since even in her present state he deferred to her judgment.

" This Denise—Antoine's daughter," he added.

" Yes, I understand. Marry her to Gaston."

" To Gaston ! "

"Yes, yes, what better can you do? Is not that the only way to bribe the aunt to silence, and extinguish the Le Marchand name?"

"A new *mésalliance*!"

"True. But a man raises his wife; gives her his own rank——"

"Very right," said the Baron, whose pride, terribly chafed by his own marriage, was unexpectedly soothed by this doctrine from his sister's lips.

"But will not all the world wonder? A De Farnoux! my heir!"

"Yes—talk! Oh, they will talk! But you said the girl had a dowry; was rich—some one said so; I don't recollect who. I cannot remember who spoke to me of Denise." She pressed her hands on her head with a perplexed, straining look, as if the thoughts refused to come. The strong will forced the enfeebled brain to do its work, however, for she went on: "I know—old Benoîte. She came to me one day, a long while ago—at least I think it was long; I have watched and waited ever since, and I saw the girl; she was like that," indicating the portrait. "A true De Farnoux. No Le Marchand about her. And I said she should marry Gaston."

"But the gossips—"

"She is rich, I tell you! Say she has double, treble, fourfold her dowry, whatever that may be.

Is not that enough to explain any marriage? Better that Gaston should seem to raise a wife below himself to his own rank, than that all Farnoux should babble over that old story which I resolved should sleep in the grave. And it shall."

"‘It shall!’—her old self! That was always the way!” thought M. de Farnoux. “I suppose it will be so now. It seems to me that she is more determined than ever. Only conceive what will become of me if this lasts! If she once begins to rule us all again, I shall go back to Paris before the week is out!”



CHAPTER XX.



HE *fête* of the patron saint was a very important day at Farnoux. To do it due honour every housewife cleansed her dwelling, scrubbed her pots and pans, and chased out all the spiders and insects which dwelt at other times in dark corners undisturbed. So thorough was this purification, that it was sometimes considered sufficient till the revolving year brought the *fête* day again. The *fête* began with a farandole, that singular southern dance of the whole unmarried population, sometimes grave, serious, and most elegant; sometimes turning into a kind of follow-my-leader, and dashing madly through the village; the mid-day repast followed; and then a ball under the broad-leaved plane-trees. So far the *fête* of Ste.-Dévote resembled that of any other southern saint, but the evening always ended with what was probably a remnant of some ancient pagan custom; fires were kindled on the high ground of the Place de l'Enfer, which all the *gamins* delighted to nourish with combustible materials.

tibles ; to say nothing of their graver elders, who, as they flung their contribution into the flames, uttered an old spell, that bade all the ill-luck of the year be consumed with it.

Ste.-Dévote, the patroness of Farnoux, was a local saint, unknown even a few miles further north, but much honoured in her native town, where a great many damsels were called after her, whose characters corresponded but ill to their edifying name. The *fête* fell in April. Thérézon came running in to remind Denise that it was come, and to ask whether she were going to the Place de l'Enfer at night to see the scene. Mlle. Le Marchand had a friend whose windows looked on the Place, and readily agreed to take Denise there in the evening.

“ Ah, what blessed things are *fête* days ! ” said Zon ; “ then one can amuse oneself a little. What day does mam’selle prefer ? Easter is charming ; all the world go into the country, and eat eggs and salad ; then the Annunciation ! Mam’selle, what a pity it is that Protestants do not believe in the blessed Virgin ! We, what could we do without her ! She comprehends all our wishes and troubles, for she is a woman like ourselves ; one would not dare to mention anything very wrong to her, you know ; not tell her things to make her blush ; but one can say, ‘ Holy Mother, I have sinned ; I

cannot tell you how ; oh, be kind, obtain my pardon.' That is what I do."

The girl spoke with *naïve* faith. Denise replied, " If the servants are so kind, what must the Master be, Zon ? "

" Ah, mam'selle ! but one's heart should be as pure as lilies, to open it to Him ! "

" You know the history of Mary Magdalene, Zon. She had no heart like a lily to bring ; she had only tears. And how He received her ! "

There was a thrill of such exceeding love and gratitude in the voice of Denise, so glad a light in her eyes, as if all the scene rose visibly before her, that Zon observed her in reverent silence for a moment, and then said, " Mam'selle is a saint herself, I believe. She is very young to be so *dévote* ; yet it seems to make her very happy. Mam'selle, I sometimes think you see Paradise ! "

Denise smiled and said, " If one could, we should find life very happy."

But she was beyond Thérézon now. " Mam'selle ! surely one would think every thing in the world gloomy and shabby ! But I was forgetting the thing that I came to say. You know, doubtless, that each year we choose a lord of the sports—some one who is a favourite, and has some wit, you see ! Only imagine, this year they have chosen Manoële, (not without opposition, mind you !) and think how .

proud I am ! Of course I dance with him in the farandoulo—and it will be a mad one this year, I warrant you ! Now I am so glad I am not married ; after all, marriage is the beginning of slavery—and married people never dance in the farandoulo. How I hope we shall come this way, and enter this house—that is a thing Mme. Rocca hates—we shall skip over benches and chairs—”

“ Is that what you call dancing ? ”

“ In the farandoulo. We all take hands, each with her partner, and whatever happens you must follow the leader, and never let go. Then there is the ball in the afternoon ; every house is open, of course, and every one sitting at the doors talking to the passers-by ; and friends come from a distance, and the gentry join in the dancing. Not so much as they used, however—indeed, many of *our* mothers say dancing does not befit modest girls. I say a modest girl can take care of herself. Mam’selle, to-day you must notice me ; I shall wear the cross grandmother brought from La Pinède. She is to lend it to me.”

“ You will never be ready, Zon ! ”

“ Bah ! I have been to mass, and you do not suppose I shall do any work to-day ? No, indeed, *daumassi* ! Did you see the procession ? the priests, and the crucifix, and the banners ? Mme. Huard gave a banner last year, made out of a dress

that she had only worn once or twice—a silk—superb!"

From an early hour the streets had been full of people, and a general hum of laughter and mirth was abroad. All Farnoux seemed in the streets, or at their doors, and Denise was surprised to see the aristocracy of the town seated on chairs and benches before their houses, exchanging familiar nods and greetings with the passers-by. All distinction of rank seemed tacitly suspended; every one wore a gala dress, and even faces as acid as Mme. Rocca's seemed to grow agreeable. The whole population had cast care aside, and were enjoying themselves.

Mme. Pitre was to chaperone Denise to the Place in the afternoon, when the ball began. The hautboy, which had already done duty at the tail of the farandole, began again to pipe, reinforced by a violin, and their sounds gathered the crowd speedily into the Place in the lower town. Every bench was soon filled with spectators, and, before the dancing was organized, the young men stood laughing together, and making remarks on the clusters of country girls, in broad hats and short striped skirts, and the grisettes, in more pretentious, but far less picturesque costumes. Two or three crones, whose age quite precluded dancing, were selling bunches of flowers to the men, who offered them to the women whom they chose for their

partners, and a fire of jests was kept up between buyers and sellers, lads and lasses.

“ Claude has a rose—here, Rosine, ’tis for you !—A bunch of ass’s pepper (wild thyme) for Jean Blaise !—Here, Jacques, buy Marie la Béguine a little *ne me touchez pas!*—Come, old Sabre de Bois, buy a bit of *arbre à perruque* to cover your bald head, or the lasses will not dance with you !”

The violin screamed louder; the dancing began in earnest; some of the notables of the town had set the example, and others were not slow to follow. Marcellin Duval had been in the thick of the fun all day; he was among the first dancers, and having looked round in vain for Denise, speedily picked out the prettiest peasant girl, who luckily for him was anxious to pique a sullen lover, and let herself be whirled off before the young man could come forward. There was great laughter and joking among the bystanders, for the countless little dramas that went on seemed perfectly comprehended and shared in by the spectators. Marcellin was in his element, amusing and amused. He had induced Gaston to come with him, promising him a subject for his muse and a variety in his life. Gaston stood looking on, indifferent to the interest accorded him, or the bright eyes that suggested he might readily find partners. Among the very few girls now partnerless was Denise. She and Mme. Pitre had

come rather late, and there were several young men present whose alliance Denise had declined. They were not sorry to have the chance of mortifying her. Every one noticed her arrival, and knew that she was standing still because no one asked her to dance. Mme. Pitre felt it much more keenly than did Denise, but she put a good face on the matter, chattered, smiled, and regretted that her position as a teacher of youth would not permit her to join in the dance. Presently, in a pause of the figure, Marcellin rushed up to greet Denise, ask if her aunt were returned, promise (uninvited) to visit her without fail, and demand why she was not dancing.

"Because no one has asked me," she answered, quietly.

"Good heavens! And I am engaged—and partners become each moment scarcer! Mine waits by the bye, and if I linger, her Celadon will certainly carry her off. He had the air of the sheep-dog who beholds a wolf elope with a lamb, just now."

Then, as ill-luck would have it, he remarked that Denise's enemy and suitor, Alexandre Verignon, was standing idle near, and exclaimed half aloud to him, "*Tu es ravissant, mon cher!* stand still when you might dance! when Mlle. Denise is disengaged!"

"One must draw a line somewhere," replied M. Alexandre audibly; "lady or peasant, well and good, but girls who belong to neither class—excuse me!"

"What do you mean by that, sir?" cried Marcellin, who saw that this was meant to be heard, and that the colour rose high on Denise's cheeks.

"Cannot you imagine, with an instance close by?"

"Desirable as a wife, but not as a partner, eh?"

"Town talk!" replied M. Alexandre, indifferently.

Gaston had heard too. He answered effectually, for he came forward, bowed to Denise, and begged her to dance with him. There was a shudder of indignant consternation amongst all the other ladies at her good luck. Zon, dancing with Manoële, saw and exulted. Mme. Pitre was *aux anges*.

"Thanks!" said Denise, raising her eyes to his. Those deep eyes startled him, he knew not why. He led her to join the dancers, among whom Marcellin, well pleased at this *dénouement*, was so highly distinguishing himself by his grace and spirit that his pretty peasant looked round on envying companions with evident triumph, while her swain had serious thoughts of summarily disposing of his dangerous rival before the day was over.

Gaston could always talk, and talk well if he pleased. He could not fail to enchain the attention of his companion, but he felt some thought was dividing her attention with him, and wondered what it was. The occasional wistful glances that she raised to him had nothing of wounded vanity. She was not thinking of M. Verignon's little spite, or the scornful half-laugh with which some bystanders had received his words. There were deeper thoughts in her mind. Gaston was right. She could not but feel it was a singular hazard that gave her Gaston de Farnoux as a partner. She saw that he knew nothing of her history, and understood that gentlemanly feeling alone had induced him to shield her from mortification. He alluded to their former meeting, but her answers were brief, and he learned little from them. Denise was occupied, too, in comparing his calm, reserved air, his courteous refinement, with the robust hilarity of Alexandre Verignon and other Farnousiens, and she was well pleased to find her instinctive contempt for their pretensions justified. "Less gentlemen by far than the real peasants! Gaston de Farnoux is of another race—another world!"

And he, as they danced and talked, was wondering more and more of whom this girl reminded him.

At the conclusion of the dance he restored her to

Mme. Pitre, and withdrew a step, as if their acquaintance had ceased with the dance. She certainly did not expect him to linger by her, but yet there was a pang of pride and regret, and a sensation as if she could not endure her false position. Mme. Pitre expressed her delight at Denise's good fortune unheeded.

Marcellin now came up and presented her with a flower, and they went back to the dance. Gaston did not choose Farnoux to say that he had danced but with one partner, and soon found another. Denise could not refrain from asking Marcellin so many questions about Gaston and the Château, that he turned to look at her, and said, "Is the Château so interesting? it is mighty dull to those who live there. I have spent two days there, and found it—sufficient."

"My aunt was much there as a girl——"

"Yes?" said Marcellin, by way of a question, for Denise was so perfectly candid that she could not make her speech sound like the whole truth.

"The Château interests me."

Her answer was simple enough, but Marcellin's keen penetration discerned that there was more behind.

"I cannot tell you why," she answered, replying to his look, "so do not ask me."

"You are altogether English!" he said, smiling,

and turned to another subject; but Denise was now horror-stricken at her incautiousness, and trembled, not without reason, lest he should report what she had said to Gaston.

“I have displeased you!” said Marcellin, tragically; “you no longer look upon me with favourable eyes. Explain, I conjure you, by our friendship!”

“If we were real friends—if you did not talk like some one in a play—I would tell you.”

“Our friendship is, or will be, real; and for the moment I will be as grave as befits the son of Duval and Co.”

“You say I am altogether English, but an Englishwoman would have known better than to say things that might sound very foolish if reported. I saw you thought my questions singular, and I had certainly better not have asked them of a stranger. Yes, we are strangers; do not be silly!” she added, with an imperious gesture, as if addressing a mere boy. “And I would rather not have it supposed I am particularly interested in the Château, because I know all Farnoux would say—would think—”

She paused and coloured with vexation.

“That your interest was concentrated on one member of it? I understand. Do not be afraid; the first time I saw you I took your conduct under

my surveillance, and I should be in despair if anything in it shocked Farnoux. Come, trust me a little, Mademoiselle l'Anglaise!"

"Yes, I do," said Denise, after surveying him.

"I shall see you again this evening?" said he.

"Where?"

"Why, on the Place de l'Enfer. Oh, I mean to be there, and burn my ill-luck with the rest of you. I have taken a holiday on purpose. And you, a new-comer, are certain to be present; I need not ask."

"Try then if you can see me," said Denise, believing that he would not be likely to look up to a second-floor window in search of her. "I would wager something that I discover you, without your seeing me."

"Done! I will wear a flower in my hat, and you shall tell me what it was, unless I spy you out on the Place."

Mlle. Legrand would certainly have called this a *rendezvous*. It was lucky that she was not near Denise.

As darkness came on the dancing ceased; the streets, however, were still filled with saunterers, enjoying the fragrant evening air. There was no moon, but the sky was clear, the stars came out in steady southern brilliancy, and one magnificent planet sent a long silver ray across the sea, along

which Thetis might have passed with her silver-slippered feet. Presently the tall bell-tower, close to the Place de l'Enfer, glowed with a very different light; the glare of a conflagration seemed reflected upon it, and a cloud of smoke rose up and hung over the town. All steps were speedily turned towards the Upper Place, Gaston and Marcellin with the rest. A long ascent led to the narrow *chemins de Purgatoire*, passing by the old church, whose open doors showed a dim space where, unheeding the joyous tumult without, a few worshippers were kneeling — weary-hearted women, whose cares none ever heard or cared to hear, but their God — there they knelt, weeping perhaps; no one could say, for they were half lost in the shadow. At the farther end of the church the clear rays of a lamp, burning before some popular altar, shone a little way in the gloom, which pressed upon it on all sides. At this hour there was no service going on. The crowd went by and pressed up to the Place, where a fire had just been lighted, to which all the population were bringing fuel; grandmothers and grandchildren came, men and maidens, sailors, fishermen, and matrons; some standing in their door-ways to look on, some leaning from windows overhead; these bringing chestnut and vine boughs, those a worn-out bit of furniture or broken basket. At each fresh offering the

shrieks and shouts redoubled, while the children joined hands, screamed out some patois rhyme, and then, snatching a lighted stick, galloped madly up and down the street, passing the burning torch from one to another till it was extinguished. The war of tongues was deafening, and a shower of cuffs sometimes added life to the scene, when an enthusiastic votary, generally a child, appeared with some offering that his elders esteemed too precious, and sought to seize and rescue ; and then a struggle would take place, in which the crowd invariably sided with the offerer, clapping their hands and shrieking applause.

“ Ah, villainous child ! my window-shutter ! give it back, I say ! ”

“ Oh, boy, plague take you ! my stool ! my stool ! ” shrieked the owner, while the crowd laughed and cheered. Then a new piece of carpet was suddenly flung into the flame, with the cry, “ There goes all the ill-luck of Mme. la Bise Noire ! ”

“ Brava, Zon, brava ! Is she liberal then, thy mistress ! *Pécaire !* she must be about to die ! ” laughed the bystanders.

“ Liberal ! bah ! we kept it till to-day on purpose,” cried Zon, at the top of her voice. “ There are *animals* in it ! ”

The flames leaped up again, exulting, and threw

their quivering light on the scarlet caps and handsome bronzed faces of the men, and the bright fichus of the women, and the eager laughing spectators leaning from every story of the surrounding houses.

"There ! Make a poem of this, *mon cher*. Write a history of our popular customs which nobody knows or cares for, but which have more poetry in them than hundreds of the subjects on which men make rhymes that gain the prize of the Academy ! But where can that little sorceress be ? She sees me, I have no doubt—I feel it !"

As Marcellin looked around, Gaston did the same. He chanced to lift his eyes towards the opposite house, where every window had gazing groups. Denise, much amused by her wager with Marcellin, had kept carefully in the back-ground till this moment, but now, anxious to note the flower he wore, she came forward. The ruddy flames were at their height, and illumined all around ; behind her all was darkness. She remained for a moment the foremost of the group. That pale face, those eyes that were searching the crowd below, that grave smile ; once more, who was it that they so strangely, so forcibly recalled to Gaston ? The answer flashed upon him—they were the features of his own family, and that face was the face of a De Farnoux.

CHAPTER XXI.



DE FARNOUX would not allow himself to suppose it possible that Gaston could dispute his will, any more than if *lettres de cachet* had been still in full force ; yet he instinctively shrank from setting before him the family arrangement lately made. He would gladly have left Mlle. de Farnoux to explain her own scheme, but he could not so far derogate from his own position as chief of the house as to delegate such a serious transaction to another ; and besides, since the stormy interview in the library, she had had an attack of illness that left her very feeble, and seemingly indifferent to everything. She did not prowl about her apartment like a caged tigress now, or ask what people were talking of in the town ; but kept her daily, listless watch at her window, gazing ever down the path by which no doubt one used to come to seek her, who came no more. The love that she had not hesitated to cast away when she thought that family honour demanded it, must have been

entwined with her life. It survived all other feelings.

So startled had Gaston been by the face of Denise, as he saw it by the light of the leaping flames, that he was already half prepared for the revelation that at length his uncle thought proper to make. Told even by him, the story of Géraldine was sad enough to touch the young man, who had seen something of a broken heart when he, a child, lived at La Pinède with his mother—that mother whose death had been the keenest anguish he had ever known! He had his full share of family pride, and it revolted as much as the Baron's could, from the idea that this dark passage of the De Farnoux history should be brought up to entertain the neighbourhood; but he could not agree that the Baron should suppress Denise, as he had once intimated his thought of doing. Gaston did Mlle. Le Marchand the injustice of believing that she might be induced to be a party to this scheme; but he declared that since Denise was after all part of the De Farnoux family, she ought to be acknowledged and provided for. This was better than the Baron could have hoped; and he even forgave Gaston's hasty interruption. Since he had reflected on Denise's fortune, he had gradually come to think a marriage between her and Gaston endurable; nay, it only needed a little opposition to make him

believe the project entirely his own, and cling to it accordingly. But he had reckoned after all without his host. Gaston had not had the remotest idea of what M. de Farnoux was aiming at, and smiled scornfully at the notion that he could consent to such a preposterous scheme. In vain did the Baron argue, order, represent ; Gaston just preserved his temper, but evinced a contemptuous scorn that drove M. de Farnoux nearly beside himself. He knew well that Lucile was the real obstacle in his way, and, stammering with rage, assured Gaston that her at least he should never marry. Uncle and nephew parted on terms that made the latter almost resolve never to see Château Farnoux again. It was not the first time that his dependence had galled him ; but never as now, when it and his love for a penniless girl were cast in his teeth together. They could not meet again till time enough had elapsed to allow both to suppose this scene forgotten, and Gaston gladly accepted Marcellin Duval's invitation to return to Marseilles with him for awhile. Marcellin was not supposed to know anything about what had just passed ; but though Gaston was slow in bestowing confidences, and, indeed, looked on them as worse than useless, Marcellin's curiosity—greater than ever was woman's—and his penetration combined, always made him so *au fait* in the affairs of his friends, that Gaston

generally found himself speaking to him as to one who of course knew already whatever there was to be known.

He felt that his sudden departure would be unwelcome news for Lucile. Not finding her in the house, he went to seek her in the blooming wilderness behind the Château. Mme. de Farnoux was there, gathering herbs to make some decoction. He had already told her he was going away for a time, and she looked flushed and uneasy, and kept near enough to watch his interview with Lucile, yet so far off as to leave them unconstrained. Lucile was just coming round the angle of the building to the terrace in front. She looked fair and bright as a wild rose, as the wind lifted the light brown locks on which the sunbeam glistened. The wild canary, who darted by like a flash, was not more bright than she. Her eyes were on it eagerly, and she exclaimed, “See, see ! there is a hawk overhead ! Poor little bird, it is in that old olive. Oh, why have you not your gun ! The hawk pounces——”

“It has missed,” said Gaston. “Your verdon has flown into the cork-wood yonder.”

“I am glad ! I cannot bear to see anything in pain ; I always go away if any creature seems to suffer. It is dreadful to witness it.”

“You would not make a *sœur de charité*,” said

Gaston, but so indulgently that probably he thought her perfect as she was.

“No, I cannot endure sorrowful things. I cannot think how the unhappy can live. And *apropos*—only the verdon put it out of my head—I was wishing you would repeat that last poem you wrote. What are those two lines—hours like roses?—I liked it so much——”

“That you have forgotten it.”

“I know I thought my hours always resembled those when with you, cousin.”

“‘Rose-like hours, so fragrant and so bright,
Their darkest shade was but a deepened light,’ ”

said Gaston, smiling, but the cloud was still on his face, and she now noticed it, and said, “O cousin! something has displeased you! Have I?”

“Certainly not. Am I in the habit of being displeased with you?”

“Then do not look grave. I will not let you look so while I am with you. If you look grave I shall go away.”

“It is I that must go away. I am going to Marseilles with Marcellin.”

“Marcellin Duval! It is always he that takes you away. O Gaston! and to-morrow is my *fête*!”

“I know it. I am sorry to miss it, but I must go.”

“Then you do not care whether it is my *fête* or

not!" and her blue eyes filled with tears. "I wish nobody had *fêtes*—they are disappointing, silly things!"

"It is Lucile who is a silly little thing," said Gaston caressingly, as she turned petulantly away. "Lucile, who will not see that only necessity could make me give her pain."

"You say so to frighten me. Why should you look grave and go away? I am sure nothing has happened."

"Nothing that I can tell you. You shall see that I do not forget your *fête*."

She looked up with the spoiled-child pout that Gaston thought so bewitching, and shook her head.

"I will give you a pledge of my good memory," he added, slipping off a ring. "You know this ring? Keep it till I return to redeem it."

"Gaston: are you in earnest? Your mother's ring! Oh, you shall never have it back!" she cried, crimsoning with joyful surprise. He kissed her silently and earnestly and left her, feeling that now he was bound to her by a bond that only Lucile herself could break. For the ring had a story, and Lucile knew it. She remained standing alone, looking at it with exultant joy.

"Oh, I am glad the bird escaped! I am glad! Everything should be happy to-day. I think everything is," she added, looking up to the cloud-

less sky that seemed repeated in the deep blue sea, rippling at the mouth of the glen. "What a happy world it is!"

Yet just above her was something that might well have startled her out of her Arcadian dreams, and brought a dismal conviction that life had storms and perils unknown and numberless. Mlle. de Farnoux sat gazing vacantly down the glen at the window overhead. The girl was dreaming of an ecstatic future—the woman living vaguely in the past. The one life had been wrecked years before; the other had gone on lightly over sunny seas, and the future lay before her bright and alluring. Lucile would have turned faint with dismay, had any one told her that her own life might become as dreary as that of Mlle. de Farnoux. If she could just then have believed in sorrow, she would have said she should dart away from it, like the little verdon from the hawk. Rosy dawn and black night seemed more nearly allied together than Lucile and sorrow.

"My ring?" She kissed the opal repeatedly. "Mamma often says that girls have nothing to do with love, but I know now that Gaston loves me! I must say it is a gift for my *fête*; I do not want to talk about it to mamma. I think she was too far off to hear us, though of course she was listening."

And she went away, with a face at once so radiant and pensive, that no woman who remembered her own youth, but might have read the story written there.

M. de Farnoux saw Gaston and Marcellin depart together. With angry steps he went out to work off his feelings by superintending the labourers in his olive-grounds ; and that morning the Provençal proverb “to swear like a waggoner,” might rather have run “to swear like a baron.” All went wrong with him that afternoon ; he thought all the world combined to cheat and defy him, and after a lengthened inspection of his property, he sat down on the broad edge of one of the deep reservoirs sunk on the hill-sides to catch the precious rain-water. The Provençals are always praying for rain ; though, when it comes, it is in such floods that one would think nothing ever would be dry again. Not a drop had fallen for weeks, dust lay thick on the trees and plants, the paths wound white and dazzling, the torrent-beds were dry ; all was thirsty and gasping, and the little water in the cistern hardly covered the thick mass of ill-smelling mud left at the bottom. There is no more pestiferous place than such a cistern ; fever and ague brood and lurk there, but his Farnoux nose was so accustomed to bad smells, that the Baron, like everybody else in the place,

hardly knew that such things existed. Besides, he was taken up with his own reflexions. He looked down the olive-covered slope below without seeing it; the Château rose overhead, but his thoughts were not there either. He was taking a review of his life, as he sat there, a little, mean, withered old man, with no future to look forward to, and nothing satisfactory in the past—unless it were those days when he acted Cupid in sky-blue wings and rose-coloured boots. He could not but remember the reverence and honour in which all had held his father; how truly and nobly he had been and borne himself Seigneur of Farnoux; how thoroughly he believed in the faith of his fore-fathers, and lived the life consistent with it of a Christian gentleman. His son had never been esteemed or respected by any one, had spent a great deal of money, lived like a pagan, and been miserable all the time. That money! it had not been his own, and therefore he had not lessened his fortune; but in these later days, the thought of having thrown away such sums at all lay heavy on his mind. He calculated what they would have brought in, properly invested, and cursed his youthful folly. And now, new discredit was impending, and Gaston would not move a finger to prevent it!

“And the olives will certainly fail, unless this

atrociously fine weather changes," said the poor Baron, as one affliction after another suggested itself, "and just because I shall have a tolerable vintage, all my neighbours will have one too, and wine be worth nothing. The girl with such a fortune too! As for those farm repairs, old Grétry may make them for himself; do they think I possess Peru?—Lucile! why she has not a brass sou! Cazlon's lease will soon be out; I shall raise the rent of that farm; he has been prosperous these three years. Ah, M. my nephew, I'll teach you to beard me! The Code says nothing about nephews, I'll disinherit him! Stay—he refuses to obey me in my lifetime, eh? then he shall obey me in my death. Death—what a hateful word that is! If it were not so inconvenient to oneself, I would die to spite him! Rags so dear, too! Why can't olives thrive without manure? The pastor says all things are for the best—why don't nephews obey uncles, and olives grow without rag-manure, then?"

M. de Farnoux was sinking into a doze, which may account for the incoherency of his reflections, though, indeed, his mind was never very logical. Provençal born and brēd, he ought to have known that none but a madman would let himself fall asleep, hot and weary, by an empty tank; but, full of mighty thoughts, he forgot this. He woke

very cold, but his mind seemed to have made itself up in sleep, for he rose and went all the way down to the town to see his lawyer. Those who saw him go by remarked how ill he looked, and calculated his age. The lawyer came the next day to the Château, and had a very long private interview, to the great disquiet of Mme. de Farnoux. She perceived signs of illness in her husband, but he only resented, even more resolutely than usual, every attempt to convince him of what he disliked. Two or three days were thus lost, days of vital importance. M. de Farnoux had caught a fever by the cistern, and swift and sharp must be the remedies employed, if the doctor would be beforehand with grim death in southern lands. The Baron knew this well, but the economy of a simple *tisane*, made by his valet, had irresistible charms for him. The *tisane* had no effect, and an impression got abroad that the Baron was seriously ill. Mlle. de Farnoux sent for a physician, and when he came the Baron, much affronted, would not see him. The terrible thought of death scared him more and more, yet he refused with anger to hear or see anything that seemed to acknowledge it was near. So some time passed. Then Mme. de Farnoux found he was evidently worse, and sought him again to remonstrate. He lay in bed, feeble, but obstinate as ever, hardly visible in the twilight.

All was very still within and without, except that Mme. de Farnoux, and the valet who waited on him, argued with him by turns or both together. No, there was nothing amiss; whatever they might wish, he should recover; Gaston would not be master yet.

As the querulous accents paused, Mme. de Farnoux and Georges exchanged looks of baffled perplexity. There was silence. All at once the long mournful cry of a flight of migratory birds, passing over the house, broke it. The cry said nothing to Mme. de Farnoux, but to the Baron and his man it said a great deal. There would be no want of charity in asserting that M. de Farnoux believed in nothing but the superstitions of his nurse; and there was not a man, woman, or child in Farnoux, but held the cry of birds passing over a house where some one lay sick, to be a sure sign of death.

Georges turned pale; the Baron hid his face with a moan. There was another silence. Mme. de Farnoux made an inquiring sign, to which the valet replied low and hurriedly. She smiled contemptuously, came close to the bed, and said, "You will not let such nonsense disturb you, monsieur; but if you feel really ill, I beg you again to see M. Piche."

He made no answer, but as she was withdrawing

raised his head and cried sharply, “What is the use of doctoring a dead man? Let me alone. All will go to rack and ruin when I am gone. I kept things together!” he murmured dolefully. “Spend, spend, now. But I have made my will.”

He lay still again, and then in a scared voice, like a frightened child, he cried out, “It is all dark. I never saw such darkness before! ‘A horror of great darkness’—who said that? I want no preaching here. Lights, Georges, quick—let me feel your hand—your fingers are like ice, man!” They had brought candles long before this, and the man’s hand was warm. Before the next morning M. de Farnoux was dead.

He had been neither respected nor deserving of respect in life, and in death no one regretted him. Not one tear fell for M. de Farnoux. When his sister heard of his death it seemed to rouse her slightly, but not as she had been roused before. She comprehended this new event, however; for she muttered, “Dead! dead! but what men do, lives on! But still he was the head of the house, and every one must put on mourning for him;” and she would not be satisfied till deep mourning, of the fashion of her youth, had been provided for her. After that she was tranquil, and sat idly at her window again. None troubled themselves about her; Gaston, who never failed

in kindness and attention to her, was away ; Mme. de Farnoux was devoured by anxieties of her own, and waited impatiently for Gaston's return, and Lucile found herself treated by the servants as their future mistress. She was not so childish but that she knew very well the difference that M. de Farnoux's death might make to her. Speculations as to the effect of it came thick upon her. For worlds she would not have entered the room where the corpse lay ; she shrank from the thought of the dead Baron, as much as from that of the living Mlle. de Farnoux ; but otherwise, she thought not at all of the awful summons that had come to the house. Her mother's maid, always Lucile's confidante, was not slow to suggest agreeable ideas, but Lucile, in fact, was rather unhappy at the prospect of marriage. She was so happy already !

" Though I should like to be called Madame," said she ; " it sounds so well, and De Farnoux is a fine name."

" Certainly, mademoiselle, and while a demoiselle is nobody, a married lady has a position in the world."

" I wonder if mamma would continue to live with me, Nina ? That would not be necessary, if we were married, would it ? I should never feel myself ' madame ' with mamma here. Perhaps she would go back to Paris."

"And you too, mademoiselle. You would not continue to live in this dungeon, where one has nothing to do but *rêver cimetière*?"

"Oh, as for that, I hate Paris. Gaston would go into the world; he would see people that he liked better than me, perhaps."

"But you would have an hôtel, and a box at the Opera."

"I am sure mamma would live with me if we went to Paris. Besides, I don't care for anything, if Gaston is with me."

"But, mademoiselle, love cannot last for ever; married, one needs some other amusement."

"I know it does not," said Lucile, sighing. "Perhaps in ten or fifteen years Gaston would get tired of me. It is very sad to think of, Nina."

"That is why I say you must have other interests, mademoiselle. If I were a lady I would have new dresses every month, and new furnish my house yearly, and wear the most fashionable jewels."

"Gaston has liked me without any."

"Ah, that is very well before marriage, but a lover's eyes and a husband's are different."

"That is why I think we are better as we are, Nina. M. de Farnoux would never have allowed us to marry, but we were together!"

"There is nothing to prevent your marriage now,

mademoiselle. If I speak the truth I shall say I find we are better without M. le Baron. Now one has a little liberty; we had such a feast to-day in the kitchen, for instance, as we never dared have in his lifetime; one requires additional nourishment at sorrowful times—*les émotions creusent*—and of course we need extra help just now, so we are quite a party. I have never known it so cheerful. M. Gaston will not poke his nose into every pot, as M. le Baron did!"

"I do wonder when Gaston will come home, Nina!"



CHAPTER XXII.



ASTON, restless and anxious, had not remained at Marseilles, but gone elsewhere the day after his arrival. Consequently, the news of his uncle's death did not immediately reach him. He returned at once when he learnt it, but he knew that the funeral would have taken place before he reached the Château. Had any one wished to delay it, they could not have done so. The law would have stepped in to prevent it; and nature, too, commands that in southern climes the dead should be speedily buried out of the sight of the living.

Gaston could not return without thick-coming thoughts. Death had suddenly thrown a sanctity round the passionate, unreasonable old man, with whom Gaston had parted estranged a little while before. His prospects were very uncertain when he left Château Farnoux; he returned the master of it, the noble old château, every stone of which was dear to him. He had loved his own home, La Pinède; many memories clustered round it, but

Château Farnoux was the birth-place of his family ; he regarded it with hereditary pride, and rejoiced to be its master, and the representative of the long line of all the De Farnoux.

And Lucile ! How her lovely eyes would brighten when she saw him ! Poor Baron de Farnoux ! how impotent his opposition was now ! So Gaston thought to himself ; but sometimes the dead are stronger than the living.

The first person he met was his uncle's valet, who, unasked, mentioned that Mme. de Farnoux was in the library. The meaning tone and smile seemed to say he knew very well what she wanted there. In fact her first care, almost before her husband's death, had been to search for his will. Armed with his keys she ransacked his bureau until she found it, and remained contented till the recent date of his lawyer's visit occurred to her, and with it the suspicion that there might be a will more recent. Greatly vexed that she should have been so slow to think of this, she recommenced her search, and had again succeeded when Gaston entered. She was reading a paper with a stormy countenance, and did not immediately perceive him. When she did she was too angry to be abashed at his detecting her, and came to meet him, exclaiming, "It is time you were come!"

"So I see," said Gaston pointedly.

"Yes, your uncle did not forget your interests! You will find he paid all attention to them!" she replied, with angry agitation. "Not a penny has he left me! Read that!"

He read. The will had been drawn up briefly and hastily, but it was in due form. It purported that all the De Farnoux property—except a legacy to Lucile, "if she did not marry a nobleman"—should come to Gaston, nephew of Auguste Pierre Paul de Farnoux, on condition of his marrying the Demoiselle Denise Le Marchand. Failing these conditions, it was to pass to Paul de Farnoux, of Suffolk, England, cousin of the Baron.

Gaston astounded Mme. de Farnoux by breaking into a laugh as he read. Perhaps he did not know himself that he laughed; he was like one whose ship has gone down in harbour, while the sky is clear and the sea smooth. Her exclamations roused him to a clearer comprehension of what had happened, and where he was.

"You laugh, Gaston! It is truly very amusing. Who are these English De Farnoux?"

"Very distant relations, whose very name I should not have thought he remembered."

And he relapsed into silence, which seemed to irritate her, for she broke out, "But it is infamous! monstrous! He cheated me in our marriage, and now he would cheat me in his death!"

"So he thinks in his grave to accomplish what he could not in life," said Gaston. "A dead man's whim against a living man's happiness."

"And one can neither persuade nor annoy him now!" said Mme. de Farnoux, with tears of vexation. "If I had only known of this while he lived! To think that he should have hid it so successfully, and all the time I was occupied in procuring consolation for his last moments! Had he had any feeling he must have found my care insupportable!"

"So, old home, you must go into hands that know you not," said Gaston, not hearing her lamentations. "You will be owned by those of the right name, or else I could wish he had left you to that pale girl down yonder, who has more right to you, than any one but myself. They will not be as proud of you as I am! The name, at least, is left me," he added, with a gesture of recovered courage, while a smile took the place of the gloomy look on his face, "and I suppose there are ways of gaining one's bread, of which a De Farnoux need not be ashamed. I shall see Paris sooner than I expected, and if you, my dear aunt, will make your home with me, to whom you have ever been most kind, I will try to repay that kindness in part. It is for Lucile that I grieve." And the dark look of resentment returned again.

"But what are you dreaming of, my dear Gaston? My home must be with my child."

"I thought that I should have had Château Farnoux to offer her; as it is, it must be a humbler home."

"He is mad!" said Mme. de Farnoux, in unfeigned surprise. "Do you imagine I can give Lucile to you now?"

Here was a taste of his altered position for Gaston. The day before Mme. de Farnoux would have lavished her gratitude on him had he offered to marry her daughter; she treated him *de haut en bas* this afternoon.

"You would not have hesitated, had I been the master of Château Farnoux!"

"Of course not! I tell you you are mad, my poor Gaston! I always loved you with all my heart; but that is no reason why, without a fortune, you should marry Lucile."

"It would be a reason against addressing her now for the first time, but you know well that she loves me."

"But I am quite poor myself; Lucile's beauty is my estate. When I was young, I said my face should obtain me a position. Alas! all that it did, was to obtain me a very *médiocre* sort of husband; and then how deceived I was in my second marriage! To think that I should be a widow twice,

and be none the better for it ! I have taken courage all the years I have been mewed up here with a foolish old man and a mad woman, thinking better times would come. I saw Lucile would be happy with you—”

“ Her happiness has suddenly become a very secondary consideration !”

“ Her happiness ! Good heavens ! have I no happiness of my own to think of ?” cried poor Mme. de Farnoux. “ Who will consider it, unless I do ? Do you think I will return to Paris as I left it ? All my friends laughed enough at me in my first husband’s time. Paris is very well for the rich ; one can spend a million there very pleasantly ; but Paris, when one must consider every sou, spare fire, patch clothes, live on a fifth floor, walk in the mud because one has not six sous to pay an omnibus—bah, bah ! The capital, if you can have a *loge* at the opera, and frequent the Café de Paris—otherwise . . . And how would you gain a livelihood, eh ?”

“ I shall write for bread instead of for amusement.”

“ Literature ! You have had some success, I know ; enough for a gentleman, but as for living by it !—ah, better spare your pains ! And, for promotion ! I hardly think you could be even a sous-préfet, your Protestantism would stand in your

way, and so it would everywhere ; you have no interest with the Government. Unless you keep Château Farnoux you will starve, and starve alone, for I will never give you Lucile ! ”

“ And how am I to keep Château Farnoux ? ”

“ Oh you need not put on your airs of masculine wisdom ! This will is abominably unjust ; your uncle was not himself when he made it. I would bear witness to that, if necessary. It is sought for, and not found ; he destroyed it. I can assure every one that he promised me he would. And he would have destroyed it had I ever known of it—of that I am certain. You and I keep our own secret, and justice is done.”

Gaston looked at her in astonishment, but her eager face did not belie her words.

“ Why not ? why not ? ” she repeated. “ These English Farnoux are nothing to you ; they will not even be disappointed, for they could never have expected to have the property. Justice requires you to have it. Dear Gaston, be reasonable ; think of me, think of Lucile, who loves you ! ”

“ And Heaven knows how I love Lucile ! ” replied Gaston, laying his hand on the will, after a momentary, vehement struggle with himself.

“ Then you will do as I say ? Ah, now I am rewarded for all I have gone through ! I wonder what my old friends in Paris will say to my coming

back with a noble son-in-law ! I wish you could bear your title, Gaston ; I cannot conceive why a chevalier does not call himself so now-a-days.”

“ Dear aunt, I am sorry to disappoint you, but the best thing I can do is to forget your mad proposal. I feel sure it was only suggested by kindness for me. It is absurd—”

“ It is you who are absurd ! You men would do a thousand things that we poor women call shameful — any one of them would disgrace a woman — but nobody calls you to account ; and then, when some little affair needing common sense occurs, you instantly talk about your honour ! Do you wish to drive me to marry Lucile to my nephew ? Ah, you start ! ”

“ Lucile may have something to say before that happens.”

“ She thinks and feels exactly as I do, Gaston.”

“ That you will allow me to ascertain for myself.”

“ I have no patience with you men, and the calm, lofty way in which you always treat a woman’s schemes ! Perhaps, however, Lucile’s arguments may seem better than mine. Lucile ! Lucile ! ”

Her shrill call reached Lucile’s ears, for she was darting in search of Gaston. She ran in, rosy with joy, but he made no step to meet her, and she

stopped in surprise. He stood and looked on her, as if there was an abyss opening between them; a lifetime was compressed into the few instants while he watched her rosy colour fade, her eyes dilate with terror, and mustered the words that were to dash all the innocent gladness of her young life to atoms. He took her hands and spoke low, but the quiver in his voice betrayed him.

“Lucile, suppose a man loved you above his life; next to his honour—above it, perhaps—Heaven help the poor wretch! Suppose he came to you one day, and said, I am penniless; I have nothing to offer you but my love; what would you say? Answer quickly, cousin, don’t torture me with suspense—what I say is plain, is it not? Was the love worth having without wealth to back it? or the man a wretched egotist to wish to drag you into the depths with him? A well brought-up girl is always guided by her mother; now then! what answer?”

He had lost his forced coolness, and spoke passionately, grasping her hands, and studying her face.

“I don’t comprehend, Gaston. Let me go—you frighten me!”

“Frighten my darling? do I? I think Lucile would answer that she thought success was by his side, and nothing but failure elsewhere; I think

she would know that by giving herself to him, she had secured him against all possibility of worldly failure ; for what could daunt him, with her love to be his light and strength ! For he loved her, Lucile ; loved her with all his heart and soul ! ”

“ There, that will do,” interrupted Mme. de Farnoux. “ The child does not understand an *a* or *b* in the whole affair. Here it is, Lucile : Gaston is threatened with the loss of Farnoux, but he can keep it by doing a very little thing. Instead, he prefers to starve, and begs you to share an empty plate with him.”

“ A very little thing ? ” repeated Lucile, gazing wistfully at him.

“ A very little thing, Lucile, but that little thing is a crime.”

“ He is an ass,” said Mme. de Farnoux. “ I only want him to do justice to me and to himself.”

“ A crime that would leave me more beggared in self-respect, than I am in fortune if I lose Château Farnoux, and that is saying much.”

“ And so, my daughter, you understand he requests you to share this agreeable lot, and live, I imagine, in some garret of the Quartier Latin ; or else he will go off to Africa, while you and I wait at home till he comes to claim you with his marshal’s staff.”

“ Lucile, it is for you to decide this. Should

you be happier in poverty as my wife, or waiting as my betrothed, or shall we part as strangers?"

"But, O Gaston! why must you be poor?"

"There it is!" said Mme. de Farnoux.

"For a reason that I cannot explain."

"Mamma, is it true? What does he mean?"

"The saints only know, my poor child!"

"Lucile!"—Gaston's voice grew harsh.—"this turns on what your own feelings may be. I do not ask you to think of me. Consider your own happiness. Shall I set you free?"

Trembling, bewildered, she looked from him to her mother. She would fain have thrown herself on his breast, and implored him to keep her safe and let nothing part them; but her mother's presence chilled and silenced her. She seemed fascinated by Mme. de Farnoux's glances, and only murmured, "Every one said you would have Château Farnoux!"

His hands slowly loosed hers; he looked down on her pityingly—a little wonderingly, and his voice grew cold and gentle as he said, "Poor child! was that your vision? I expected too much! I have nothing to offer you, Lucile, now."

"Nothing! and now, Gaston, I have given you every chance," said Mme. de Farnoux; "but even this child can see that to marry a beggar is ludicrous. Ah, what fools men are! what an unlucky woman

I have always been! Come, my dear child, let us go—come, I say!"

Lucile let her take her hand, but looked piteously to Gaston, whose eyes had dwelt on her all the time, but the ardour of the gaze had changed into bitterness. "Gaston!"—she whispered, imploringly, "Gaston!"

"No, no—we have had enough and too much, my child, come!"

Lucile resisted now. "Cousin! you know I will do whatever you wish."

"Go with your mother, Lucile."

"Oh, do not speak so—don't kill me by such a look—let me stay!"

"No one but yourself could have separated us. As it is, your mother was right."

"O cousin!" and she made a movement to spring to him, but her mother's grasp was firm, and her whisper emphatic. Lucile covered her face with her disengaged hand, and sobbed piteously. Perhaps Gaston even yet thought she would return, but he forgot that Mme. de Farnoux had accustomed her to implicit obedience. Lucile, faintly resisting, let herself be led away. He watched them go, heard the door close—close on all the past and its hopes—and he was alone. The will lay open before him. He stood looking down on it for

a moment or two without seeing it ; then he remembered suddenly what it was. Who would ever ask an account of it—a lawyer who had no interest in it—distant relatives who would never hear of it ? tyrannical, unjust will ! He walked up and down, while the temptation to destroy it grew every instant fiercer. He thought of Lucile, and even when his anger that she had loved him for his fortune was hottest, the desire to make her his wife was stronger still. He knew she was weeping somewhere, and he had a wild impulse to find her, console her, promise whatever she asked. His quickened steps told the tumult in his mind. Fortune, love, all lost together ! He had thought sometimes of late with interest of Denise, but now only as the bride forced upon him ; the recollection of her sickened him. Then he stood still before the broad hearth, while anger at the injustice done him combined with all his other thronging thoughts, as if to madden him. The last of his name, and a beggar ! His eye caught the motto of the De Farnoux carved deep and black above the hearth : *Sortes mei in manu Dei sunt*, and in his present mood he repeated it with something like derision. The familiar words recalled associations in which he was accustomed to delight. A long line of ancestors had made it their device, and shown their faith by their spotless honour and brave lives, and whatever tricks fortune

might play him, he was still the representative of those dead lords of Farnoux.

“We must have degenerated of late!” he muttered. “We are hardly worthy to be even *roturiers* now-a-days!” and he smiled in disdain of his own mocking words. “‘All is lost save honour’ should be my motto. Honour! that will go next. Our ruin will be complete then, and the bourgeoisie in the person of Mme. de Farnoux, *née* Luchon, may triumph. No, by heavens, that she never shall! Share such a secret with that woman! throw my honour into her hands! I am not come to that yet; the moon is not quite full! I must have been fit for the Bicêtre a moment ago. Why, when she coolly suggested her scheme, I felt the temptation; but, spoken out by another person, it seemed utterly vile and impossible. Now, left alone with that bit of paper, I seemed to hear a legion of demons tell me I must, and ought, and should destroy it! What a scoundrel I must be!” He rang the bell impetuously.

“Georges! (to the valet who answered it) Take that paper”—he folded and sealed it—“to M. Richer. Tell him to keep it safely. That is all. Away with you!

“That is done!” he added, with a deep breath. “So far is clear. Mme. de Farnoux, I must see you again and hear your plans for the future. I

thank Heaven that I did not come upon that will alone ; that I had time to remember how the plan to destroy it sounded from another's lips. After all, I am not a deliberate villain, but there is not much self-respect left me. I am poor enough without losing that. I was rich an hour ago, and now I find myself without home, fortune, or bride. Poor child, I think she loves me after all ; and as for me, it makes a fool of me when I think of what I planned for her only this morning."

He threw himself into a chair, and hid his face in his hands.



CHAPTER XXIII.

GASTON, as he considered what future was open to him, found himself believing that, could he but offer her a maintenance, Lucile would still share it. He did not know Mme. de Farnoux. He had lived half his life near or with her, and yet knew nothing of her after all. He had judged her as she affected himself, and to him she had always shown a caressing amiability, by no means insincere. Mme. de Farnoux was not exactly mercenary: she esteemed rank above riches, she loved to see every one comfortable and gay about her, and indeed, if they were not so, felt quite ill-used, for sad looks interfered with her own comfort. Gaston had seen her give money readily, and treat those who came in contact with her with captivating softness and gaiety; and, though not a lady at the core, she had sufficient cleverness to catch the tone of good society, and never offend even his fastidious taste. He had yet to discover the hard layer of selfishness that was the foundation of her character. She,

who would have exclaimed against the hurting of a fly, would have crushed it without remorse had its buzzing annoyed her. Now, that she was forced to afflict Lucile was truly vexatious; but what could she do, if Gaston would not be a reasonable man! And her anger against him waxed hotter.

It burst out, when she heard from him, that the will was no longer in his hands, and she expatiated on the cruelty and heartlessness of his conduct both to her and Lucile. Though his own happiness was so nearly concerned, Gaston could not help smiling. He had counted on seeing Lucile again, but Mme. de Farnoux watched so well, that neither letter nor message reached her. Lucile's tears annoyed her mother, and called forth some sharp words, after which the poor child shed them only when unseen. To both her and Gaston a page of life's book was opening, “wherein dark things were writ, hard to be understood.”

Gaston wrote to the English connections, who so unexpectedly found themselves interested in the old Château. Once upon a time a De Farnoux and his wife had taken their lives in their hands, and fled from their native France, when she offered them the gentle choice of turning Roman Catholics, or being lodged for life on board the galleys. Etienne de Farnoux thought the galleys were already sufficiently manned by Huguenots,

and the convent that awaited his wife seemed to him worse than galleys, scaffold, or fire. The French Protestants held the strongest possible opinions as to what sort of life was led in convents, apart from their aversion to the doctrines taught there. They viewed them as the nests of all iniquity ; and those who know what Port-Royal was before the time of the excellent Mère Angélique, will scarcely charge them with injustice. Etienne de Farnoux, with wife and child, crossed the south of France in disguise, reached Bordeaux, and finding so strict a watch kept on all vessels, that escape from that port was impossible, embarked further down the river in an open boat, and let the winds and waves take them where they would. Such faith as this was shown by hundreds of French Protestants in that time of terror. Etienne de Farnoux had no reason to repent his belief that, not loving his life he should find it : an English merchant vessel picked up the little party, and landed them at Rye, where already a small band of refugees had found a welcome. Some were of low degree, and better prepared to earn their bread than the De Farnoux ; but they all found friends and prospered. In course of time the De Farnoux became so thoroughly naturalised in England, that their very name grew Anglicised. They became a family of consideration, settled down in

Suffolk, near the paper mill that had made their fortune; and kept no token of foreign descent except the French names from time to time bestowed on a child of the family. There were Raymonds and Gastons among them still, and still they avoided the Louis or Louisa, that had become hateful in Huguenot ears, as the name of the faithless king who took back from them the toleration granted by the Edict of Nantes. “French of Paris did they nothing know,” any more than Chaucer’s Prioress, but they recalled their family history complacently, and kept up with some pride the recollection, that in Provence still dwelt the elder branch of their family in the old Château which bore their name. Gaston had some acquaintance with these English cousins. The squire who represented the head of them happened once to visit Paris, and accidentally heard the name of Gaston’s father mentioned. He made inquiries, and got acquainted with him, but the Englishman and the fashionable *roué* had not a single point of contact; the one was honestly disgusted, the other sneered contemptuously; but Gaston, then a school-boy, received a kind invitation to Farnoux Park, and spent the vacation of that year there. He had very pleasant recollections of that summer, and could write with full confidence that his cousins would not rejoice in the turn of fortune that would transfer Château

Farnoux from himself to them; and he had no fear of their refusing his request that Mlle. de Farnoux might spend the rest of her life undisturbed in her old home. He paid her a kind visit daily, which seemed to please her, though she hardly ever now answered connectedly; and he thought it unnecessary to tell her what changes were impending. No one but himself, Mme. de Farnoux, and the family lawyer, as yet knew the conditions of the Baron's will.

In due time an answer came to his letter. He had told little, but that the conditions, by which the property would be his, were impossible to fulfil; and worthy Paul Farnoux, unwilling to profit by injustice, suggested that Gaston should meet him in Paris and explain the business more fully. His sons were settled in life, his daughter married, and he would make a second wedding tour to Paris with his wife. The jovial tone of the letter contrasted strangely with the feelings with which Gaston received it. He would fain have settled the matter at once and have done with it. To live in the Château with Lucile close at hand, yet never see her, was intolerable; and in any case he must have gone to Paris, to learn how his plans of earning daily bread could best be carried out.

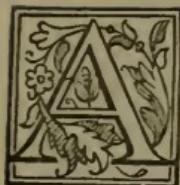
Mme. de Farnoux, meanwhile, was preparing to leave the Château, and the neighbourhood began

to marvel and discuss the evident breach between her and Gaston. All agreed that she had wished him to marry Lucile, and been baffled, and every rumour that gossip could devise floated about; while mingled with them were surmises, gathering strength and consistency, as to the parentage of Denise. Those who knew most had held their tongues; but Lucile had recollect ed and spoken of the strange inscription at the foot of the portrait, and the servants had spread the story of it. Farnoux had noted the Baron's visit to Mlle. Le Marchand, and knew that he had made particular inquiries as to the fortune of Denise. Mme. Rocca too had stored up every hint of the private history of her lodgers, and knew it almost as well as they did themselves. Perhaps she had listened at the door during the Baron's stormy interview with Mlle. Le Marchand. There had been a flutter of a silk dress in the passage just before Mlle. Le Marchand expelled him. Every one was on the alert to see what Gaston would do next; and, when he seemed to be doing nothing, they explained it as best they could. Mlle. Le Marchand was on tenter-hooks lest a long cherished hope should fail. No girl ever lived in a more romantic world than she, or regarded a love-match more tenderly, though her grim, grey exterior gave no token of such weakness; whatever had been her early history,

she had once for all, in youth, given up all day-dreams for herself, but she cherished them boundlessly for others. When Gaston and Denise met on the Pic des Maures, she seemed to see her hoped-for drama commencing, and had waited, and hoped, and feared, ever since. Once she grew unbearably restless, and carried off Denise to visit Marcellin's family at Aix; but she soon returned, and waited with growing impatience in her den. It was not rank or fortune that she wanted for her niece; but reparation for the past, and love for the future. Denise followed her thoughts with tolerable accuracy, but smiled at them quietly. She did not think an alliance between herself and Gaston at all likely; and though the visit of the Baron had roused in her a conflict of feelings that surprised her, she had hardly wondered when nothing more was heard of him. Only, these feelings once roused would not be put quite to rest again, and weariness of her daily life was upon her. She had lived hitherto the stillest life imaginable, but it had not been tedious, for her keen clear mind found food for thought in every trifle. She was not a reader, however; and, like some of the same temperament, had centred all her imagination on one subject, and it turned to faith—faith so singularly child-like, profound, and practical, that not one in a hundred persons would have understood it. To

her each event, great or small, seemed sent direct from Heaven ; men were permitted to be the instruments by which these things were done, but unless so permitted could do nothing, either for good or ill. As the girl sat alone she would muse on these things, unwitting how little those about her shared her views, and picturing scenes from her Bible to herself with a vividness that made them almost more visible than the room where she was, or the old cloister where she sat. And now she strove to still the impatient throbs of her young heart, by telling herself that when the right moment came something new would happen, and till then this life, where she was set by no choice of hers, must be the best for her. When she answered her aunt in this manner, Mlle. Le Marchand would look at her, as if trying to enter into the calm trust that look and words alike expressed, and then sigh, and say, “ Child, to me you always seem of a positive nature, unromantic as a wig-block ; yet there are times when you recall to me one whose life was a long heroism. Thirty years did she spend in prison in Aigues-mortes. I can barely recollect her ; but I know that to her, what she believed, was the one important thing in the world—it bore her through those deadly years ; and so it would be with you ! ”

CHAPTER XXIV.



JOURNEY to Paris took some time before the railroad along the Rhone was made. It seemed interminable to Gaston's impatience. He found his cousin quite taken up with showing sights to his wife, and quite averse to business; the worthy pair were, indeed, enjoying a second honeymoon. Gaston had no inclination to intrude his personal concerns on them, and said nothing of Lucile, or of the beggared condition in which he found himself. The hearty Suffolk squire was cordial and kind-hearted as possible, but there was nothing about him that invited a young man to confide a love-tale to him; and Gaston suffered too keenly not to shrink from an approach to the subject of his lost love. Nor could he well lay his money affairs before the very man who would profit by his poverty. Mr. Farnoux (he had dropped the De) was exceedingly reluctant to take advantage of the Baron's will. He did not offer to give up the property; perhaps he hardly could, in justice to his own

children ; and, knowing nothing of Lucile, he could laugh and urge Gaston at least to see a little more of the bride tacked on to the estate, since by his own confession he had but three times met her, and might come to like her after all. And having thus discharged his conscience, he bade him decide at his leisure, refused to hear any more about the matter, and went off to the theatre with his wife.

Gaston knew there was nothing but kindness in this, but he was in that state that any decision would have been a relief to him. The careless good-humour with which Paul Farnoux treated what was life and death to him galled him ; and yet he shrank from the gentle interest of Mrs. Farnoux, who was clearer-sighted than her good husband, and had also treated Gaston, when he visited her as a boy, with a tender kindness that had made him worship her. He grew very anxious too on the score of employment ; he vainly sought one that he could undertake, and vainly looked for friends who might have helped him in this strait. At last he left Paris suddenly, and went south again, pausing at Aix to seek a friend of very old standing, who had known his family for years, M. Duval, the father of Marcellin.

The elder Duval had retired from business, but his brothers and sons belonged to a firm long established at Marseilles. Though their warehouses

and bureau stood in a gloomy, out-of-the-way street, and were of modest appearance, the Duvals carried on business in every quarter of the world. Indian shawls, English cottons, Lyons silks, and Turkey carpets met in all harmony under the roofs of their *magasin*. The house followed old traditions of steady, sober trade, made no rash ventures, but thrived and prospered from generation to generation, till it became a sort of proverb to say, “Sure as a Duval affair.”

Marcellin’s father had made his fortune, and bought himself a property at Aix, where he lived and enjoyed all good things in a sober way—the society of pretty women, wine, and sunshine; but his old business habits were not forgotten, and he spent a good deal of time at Marseilles. Gaston arrived at Aix on a Sunday, when all the population were strolling up and down the Cours, shaded by plane-trees, and adorned with a huge statue of good King René, under whose brows two swallows had built their nests. Gaston had no thoughts for the Judas-trees rosy with blossom in the gardens, or the pretty girls in the crowd; he sought impatiently for M. Duval, and found him, accompanied by wife and daughter, promenading leisurely with all the world. There was nothing for it but to delay what he had to say, and stroll along too, and talk of the almonds and vines, and *les mouches qui volent*.

Later in the evening, however, M. Duval and his cigar were at Gaston's service, and they came out again, and sat on a bench on the Boulevard.

"Now let us talk business," said the merchant. "Your family always come to me when they are in a scrape. So Mme. de Farnoux and you have quarrelled, and she is gone to her brother at Marseilles. What does it all mean?"

Gaston explained briefly.

"Hum!" said M. Duval, stroking his chin meditatively; "it was always a thing that angered me to think of—your marrying Lucile Gautier. A pretty creature; she might have sat as a model to Greuze; but the mother . . . much better without her, my friend, unless you could have suppressed the mother. And now you want employment. What can you do, eh?"

"I have studied law," said Gaston, struggling with the feelings that surged up on hearing Lucile thus spoken of.

"Law? You have no interest. You cannot live on law. How many years do you think it would take to make 4000 francs per annum by the law? You have written—written well, too. But you can't live by that either. You spend so much time in bringing everything you write to perfection. Would you like to play *journaliste*, and write articles for—let me see—the *Aigle Farnousien*?"

“ I fear my table would have little on it if all the provisions were brought in by the *Aigle*.”

“ *Journaliste* in the provinces, or say at Paris. Labour without recompense, convictions suppressed, talent at the command of the blockhead in power over you. Articles written whether you have anything to say or not. And if you would belong to a leading paper, you must have a name worth signing at the bottom of your article, or your *feuilleton* —a name better known than yours.”

“ I grant you the picture is not rose-coloured, but one must live, though Talleyrand thought it unnecessary; but then he was speaking of another, and not of himself. It is at least indispensable to the individual.”

“ If you had interest you would make your way. You have none. Nay, that touch of politics in that little *brochure* of last year has done you harm. It is unfortunate.”

“ A man must say what he thinks,” said Gaston, smiling.

“ Renounce journalism after that sentiment, my friend. What remains? If I offered you a clerkship in our business——”

“ I should assuredly take it.”

“ Bah! you know nothing about it, M. Gaston de Farnoux. Your education has not fitted you for it. You would be miserable, *mon garçon*. You

would not die of hunger, but you would of *ennui*. And the clerks—good fellows, but not the society you are used to. You are too aristocratic ; they could not resist the desire to mortify a De Farnoux."

"What is good enough for Marcellin, is good enough for his friend."

"Marcellin ! There is a difference between a son of the house and a clerk. *Allez, allez, mon garçon* ; believe me this would not do. Now, could you be *intendant* to some family ; that, too, is not the direct road to the sun."

"Then it only remains to enlist."

"Well, that might do, though *consignes* are not agreeable. I know a man of noble birth who took this course. I last saw him carrying a sack of potatoes on his shoulder for the use of the regiment. His comrades liked him ; he treated them to wine when he could, and kissed the landlady with perfect good-breeding. The pay is not great, certainly. By the bye, have you any debts ?"

"Too true it is, when I was a student in Paris and thought La Pinède was mine——"

"Young man," said M. Duval sharply, "you all seem to think that the only way to prove yourselves gentlemen is to spend all your fortune in folly, and worse than folly. How are you to acquit these debts with a soldier's pittance ?"

" My good friend, I have said it all to myself a hundred times. Surely in this France of ours there must be something to do. I came to you to hear what I could do. You only tell me what I cannot."

" You can marry your cousin Denise," said M. Duval, turning his little bright eyes on Gaston.

" So they have proclaimed the story!" exclaimed Gaston, who had kept back the history of Denise.

" No, you need not start and waste your indignation. You need not suspect my good old friend Mlle. Le Marchand; she told me the story the other day in strict confidence. But it must all leak out."

" You, too, recommend this expedient!"

" My dear boy, I may be a prejudiced adviser. I knew something of your aunt and mother, and I testify their fate was a hard one. Denise is their image, and I confess I should like to see Géraldine's daughter at Farnoux. A clever girl, too, capable *de tenir salon* as a man wishes his wife to do."

" There is a fatal objection," said Gaston.

" Lucile Gautier. But it is decided that she marries young Luchet—"

Gaston's brief exclamation startled him. He looked in the young man's face, paused, and continued with emphasis. " I know it is so. I know it has been in contemplation these two months. I wish the poor girl had a happier lot; but as it is,

Gaston, she must forget you. You know she must."

"Married—Lucile—my Lucile—impossible! But a few weeks ago——Why, she still wears my ring!"

"Very likely. You don't know women, Gaston."

"I tell you that girl loved me with all her heart and soul—"

"I daresay you loved her in that mad fashion, but for all that she will marry Luchet. He is rich, *mon garcon*. What are you now?"

Gaston could not help remembering Lucile's consternation when she heard of the loss of Château Farnoux.

"I shall have no rest till I know the truth of this," said he, starting up. "We will talk of business another time."

"Stay, stay—where are you going? To Marseilles! What to do there?"

"I shall, at all events, see Mme. de Farnoux."

"Have you not already attacked her twice? You have nothing new to say. And as for seeing Lucile, which of course is at the bottom of your thoughts, you may be sure that will not be allowed. Think what the consequences would be—I don't mean to yourself—if you roused that young demon Luchet's jealousy. No doubt you would like nothing better than to dispute her, hand to hand, with him.

Consider the weapon you arm him with, if you appear and there is a scene. ‘The old lover,’ every time the husband was out of humour. Come, my boy, be generous.”

“Duval, I must know whether they have forced her to consent.”

“Write, then.”

“I take your advice,” said Gaston, after a pause. “I will enclose a letter for her in one to her mother, and it shall reach her. I will take care of that.”

They rose, and walked the length of the Boulevard in silence. As they turned, M. Duval pressed Gaston’s hand, and said, “Gaston, you would scorn to play the tempter. Never see Lucile again; you are answerable for her and yourself. I will help you now, or later. Go and write your letter if you choose, but avoid meetings. They will undo you both.”



CHAPTER XXV.

GASTON awaited a reply to his letter in Château Farnoux, whose solitude suited well with his present temper. Solitude was an old acquaintance. As a child, he had been the constant companion of a melancholy mother, who loved to keep him beside her, but had no spirits to amuse her little son. He hardly knew his father, who lived almost entirely in Paris; his mother, her confessor, who taught him, and the servants and peasants of the neighbourhood, were the only people he ever saw. Féline de Farnoux, after her vain struggle to satisfy heart and mind with pleasure was abandoned, gave herself up to austere devotion, and for years before her death was a prey to the melancholy temperament of her family.

La Pinède was peculiarly fitted to nurse such moods. It stood amid the pine-wood from which it took its name, amongst whose gloomy branches the sea-wind sighed and moaned, while the waves washed its outskirts, and tossed up a fringe of foam

and sea-weeds, and heaped fragments of broken shells among the very roots of the fir-trees. A plain without path or track, broken by clumps of feathery tamarisk, or white oblong stacks of salt and brine-pools, stretched around the Château, and a scanty, fever-stricken population inhabited the few huts that appeared near the *étangs* or salt-lakes. The very herbage was rank and strange ; the sea-birds flew round, with harsh, mournful cries. A lonely and imaginative child could not fail to be strongly impressed by such an abode. Gaston's after-life had never effaced its effect ; it had made a solitary student of him. La Pinède was his no longer ; every sou had gone to pay the debts of a father of whom he had not one gentle recollection. In the solitude of Château Farnoux, reminiscences of his childhood thronged upon him ; and as he recalled as much of his mother's history as he knew, there mingled with the deep resentment that the thought of her sufferings always aroused, a strong interest and curiosity as to the history of the young sister of whom Félide used to speak so fondly—that Géraldine who had cost him so dear. What had not she too suffered before and after she fled from her home ! His deep affection for his mother led him to compassionate this other sufferer, and his romantic temper induced him to sympathise strongly with the outcast who

had died unforgiven. While arranging family papers, he came upon the heart-broken letter from Géraldine, which Mlle. Le Marchand had restored to the Baron; for M. de Farnoux had had a kind of superstition against destroying or giving away anything. Every note or bill that he had received for years was still in existence, in the mass that filled the drawers of his writing table, and the old cabinets in the library. This letter moved Gaston's inmost heart. The dead lips on which the dust had long been heaped appealed to him to protect Denise, and in his present mood, when the brightness of life seemed vanished, and each day he saw more clearly that Lucile could not be his, the thought of showing kindness to the orphan cousin, who had no better protector than her strange old aunt, attracted him strongly. If, however, the idea presented itself that thus his own difficulties would be solved, he turned angrily from all thoughts of Denise; and if he were influenced by it, it was unconsciously to himself.

He felt as if he had waited months for Lucile's reply, yet it really came with little delay. It was authentic. He could not doubt the childish style, the tremulous characters tear-blotted. It ran thus: "Dear Gaston,—Mamma has convinced me that it is my duty to marry my cousin Auguste. She says I shall learn to love my husband, and that she will

always be with me ; and she says there is no one like a mother. But, O Gaston—” here some words smeared out—“ However, that is all over, and I suppose you will forget me soon. I know I ought to forget you. L. G.”

So she had submitted ! To the last he had never thought she would. He had believed that some new turn of the wheel would again change all their destiny. No doubt she had resisted a little, but her love had been but a childish fancy ; while his !— And Marcellin wrote that he had seen her, and she looked just as she used to look in old times ! Gaston could not dispute a bride who seemed so easily resigned to her fate, and yet he waited in suspense, as if he did not know what the next act in the drama must be. It was actually an unexpected blow, when he received the formal announcement from Mme. de Farnoux that Lucile was married. The wedding had been strictly private, in consequence of her step-father’s death, barely three months before ; and Mme. de Farnoux might have added that the world was highly amused at her haste to secure her son-in-law. There lay the astounding announcement before Gaston—Lucile had become Mme. Luchet.

He never gave any account of how he spent the three next days ; the fourth was passed in wandering in the hills. He came back to the Château

wearied out in body and mind. Those days had tamed him strangely. He was tired of solitude now, and wished Marcellin Duval would come to him ; but Marcellin was at Marseilles, and he had no companion but the hound which Denise had caressed so fearlessly on the Pic des Maures. Lucile had always detested this dog, half in childish fear, half in jealousy of anything that shared Gaston's affection with her. The creature was now lying at his feet ; as he moved restlessly and sighed, it raised its head and laid it on his arm. Somehow, the wistful intelligence of its eyes reminded him of Denise, when she thanked him at the *fête*. He rose and sought the letter of her mother, and read it through again, and it touched him anew.

“ My own happiness has gone down in the storm, yet I might secure that of this girl,” he thought. “ Love I have not to give, but what I can I will. She shall hear the whole, and then decide. I will see her to-morrow.”



CHAPTER XXVI.

 ASTON had hesitated long, in all the tortures of indecision, and now that he was resolved to act, he did it impetuously. Many motives, that he hardly was conscious of, had combined to decide him. One was the desire to put every possible bar between himself and the image of Lucile. The thought of having Mlle. Le Marchand for a near connection was at this moment quite indifferent to him, though formerly he would have been disgusted by it. Just as he reached her door, Zon came out. Her eyes sparkled with surprise and delighted intelligence at the sight of him, and she said, "Shall I announce monsieur? Mam'selle is reading to her aunt."

He put her aside, entered, and shut her out. As he stood in the little passage unnoticed, he could look full into the room, the door being open, and saw therein Mlle. Le Marchand sitting at her easel, with sketches heaped round her; but she held her brush idle, while she listened with profound atten-

tion to what Denise was reading, in English, from a great volume. The words were unfamiliar to Gaston, and struck him as singularly poetical; and as he looked at the girl's earnest, serene face, and heard the expressive modulations of her voice, he could not but own to himself that the man who had so pure and sweet a face at his hearth was not to be pitied after all.

“Give me wisdom that sitteth by Thy throne, and reject me not from among Thy children O send her out of Thy holy heavens, and from the throne of Thy glory, that being present she may labour with me, that I may know what is pleasing unto Thee.”

Denise paused. Mlle. Le Marchand spoke a moment later. “Thank you, child, I like to hear you read. I sometimes think wisdom has spoken to you indeed.”

“Does it not speak to every one, dear aunt? Even if we do not exactly recognize its voice as we go along our way, our hearts often burn within us; and at last, if we listen long enough, we shall know and see whose voice it is.”

“You are thinking of Emmaus. I like the thought, child, and I daresay the voice is in all things that speak to our hearts.”

“You followed my English quite easily, aunt?”

“Quite, quite; I understand it well enough,

though I am such an old blockhead, that though I was three years in England I could never, from first to last, speak two words to be comprehended. Cocotte there could speak it infinitely better than I. Roast beef! my Cocotte, speak!"

Here Gaston came forward. Mlle. Le Marchand's back was towards him and she did not see him, but Denise did, and said with some emotion, "Aunt, M. de Farnoux!"

"Nonsense, child, he's dead and buried!" exclaimed Mlle. Le Marchand, turning sharply towards the door. "What! Oreste! And what brings you here?"

"To speak a few words to my cousin, with your leave," said Gaston, bowing to her.

"Your cousin! Ah, if you claim to speak to her by that title, you may say what you like; you have a right," said Mlle. Le Marchand, sitting down, as if she had no share in the interview.

Denise was standing by the table, with a blush deepening fast on her cheeks. She felt that scarcely any motive but one could have caused this visit.

"Denise," said Gaston, in rapid, agitated tones, "it is only a little while ago that I learnt your history. My uncle told me of our relationship, and he expressed a strong wish that we two should be united in marriage, in a *mariage de convenance*. I was then full of hopes, of projects that . . . No

matter now. You shall hear what they were another time, if you choose. I did not think then that such a marriage was possible for either of us. What do we know of each other? You do not love me, nor do I love you, at this moment.—You may well ask why, saying this, I still come here to-day, desiring above all things to hear you promise to be my wife—”

“ Is it because I am half a De Farnoux, cousin ? ”

“ In a measure,” he answered, wincing at hearing her address him by the name that Lucile had always spoken so fondly.

“ Perhaps it is because you find Château Farnoux wants a mistress,” said Denise, smiling, to keep down rising tears.

“ Would these motives satisfy you, Denise ? ”

“ They seem to me good ones,” she answered, with the calm acquiescence of a French girl.

Mlle. Le Marchand saw Gaston bite his lip. He was silent, and resumed in a measured tone: “ If they suffice, I need say no more. Our compact is clear. We will not talk of love, but enter on life together as good friends and affectionate relations.”

“ Yes,” answered Denise, relieved by his change of tone, for the agitation with which he began to speak had scared her. And then he kissed her

hand, and asked Mlle. Le Marchand if she would give him her niece.

"All of her that I have to give," she replied, brushing away a few tears. "She was a De Farnoux from the beginning. God grant the child more happiness than those who lived before her in the old Château ever knew."

Gaston looked at her, and suddenly held out his hand and pressed hers warmly.

"Thank you," she said, in an unsteady voice; "I am glad to touch the hand of a De Farnoux in friendship again. I think I could forgive even Mademoiselle now; and when the child is married I shall go away, and you may forget the Le Marchand connection if you like. No, I'm not speaking to you, silly girl; M. Gaston cannot be expected to feel as you do on this subject."

"Denise must not imagine that she loses her best-loved relation in accepting a husband," said Gaston, very kindly. "Before the time you speak of, we shall be too good friends to think of parting."

"I can't say, I'm sure, where M. le Baron may be at this moment," said Mlle. Le Marchand; "but I do think it can't be within hearing, or he would have manifested his presence now. If he desired anything in the world, it was to annihilate me. He came down here in the strength of his foolishness, thinking it was as easy as stringing beads to sup-

press the past. Poor man! And I was as stiff-necked as an old ram, and bided my time. Well, well, we'll talk of business another time. You had better go now; you have already made my hand shake so that I shall not be able to paint another stroke to-day. Adieu, Oreste."

By and bye Gaston did go. He had gained a new view of the uncouth old lady who seemed created to shock his taste in every way—and nothing is so implacable as taste. Yet he could now imagine Marcellin's estimate of her correct. But Denise! Denise, whose quiet, business-like view of the affair had thrown him back on himself, when he was about to tell her all! Doubtless she would have accepted Alexandre Verignon, had he been master of Farnoux! After all, Gaston said to himself in the bitterness of his heart, it was well, for he could fully give all that she was ever likely to desire.

Mlle. Le Marchand sat in a beatific reverie, till Denise raised her head, which had been resting on her aunt's lap, and then she said, "Child, it was a providential thing that you did not accept young Verignon."

"I could not. I have only seen two people whom I could have married."

"*Two!*"

"Marcellin Duval, and my cousin Gaston."

"Either, unfortunate child? either of them? One as freely as the other?"

"I can see which is the handsomest," said Denise, laughing and colouring.

"Good heavens! do you like them equally? Do you mean you would have married Marcellin if he had asked you?"

"Yes, aunt; I think he is good and true, and would make any one happy."

"Oh, you wretched girl, I have a great mind to call that poor young man back and confess the truth! I refuse my consent! I'll have him back, I'll be no party to such treason," cried Mlle. Le Marchand, furiously.

"Dear aunt, you do not imagine I could care for either till they were more than slight acquaintances," said Denise, with a little show of proud amusement. "M. de Farnoux must know that.—I suppose one learns to feel very differently, and even now I could trust and love my cousin dearly. I recollect noticing his manner to Lucile Gautier, and thinking that she must feel so safe and happy. Yes; I am happy, very happy; I knew that if it were good for me some change would come."

"You should have belonged to the Quietists, child. What do you mean?"

"This new life that has come to me was none of my own seeking, aunt; I have waited and tried to

be patient, though sometimes I did long for something more to care for and to do ; but there was no outlet. So I knew I ought to wait on tranquilly. You see more than I dreamed of has been sent me ; and I am so glad to think all this."

"It is the most singular thing," said Mlle. Le Marchand, who had followed the girl's every look and gesture as she spoke ; "one would not suppose that religious opinions could be inherited like family features, and yet here is this child talking exactly like her ancestress, Madeleine Le Marchand, who took her creed with her into that purgatory Aigues-Mortes, and lived there happy on the strength of it. Child, where did you learn these thoughts ?"

"I always had them, aunt."

"You are a riddle to me, child—a riddle that I never can solve. Perhaps your husband may find out the *mot d'éénigme*."

When Mme. Pitre returned in the evening from her daily round, the first sounds she heard were the impromptu variations to Mendelssohn's Wedding March, which Mlle. Le Marchand was executing on her violin. Now the notes breathed softly as a lullaby ; then they rose into stormy shrieks of triumph, with shrill lamenting sounds amongst them, which probably represented the discomfiture of the poor Baron. Presently a wailing voice, inexpressibly sad, spoke of past recollections,

but at last it changed into a strain still grave, and with a touch of sadness in it, but firm and sweet; and this depicted the union of the current of two lives, flowing on to the sea together. Mme. Pitre came in, and spoke, but Mlle. Le Marchand took no notice of her till the last note had died into silence; and then, laying aside her violin, she pointed gravely to Denise, and said, “King Cophe-tua has come; the wedding is fixed; and there sits the bride. Let me present you to the future Mme. de Farnoux.”



CHAPTER XXVII.



O all the world learnt that Denise was to marry Gaston de Farnoux; and it now became his part duly to pay his court to his *fiancée* during the time that would elapse before the marriage. His pride was unlike his uncle's, for he was careless of concealing the relationship that had seemed such a disgrace in the eyes of the Baron, and indeed looked down contemptuously from the height of his aristocracy on what gossip might be pleased to say concerning him. If at this time he had cared to reflect on such things, he would have wondered to find himself an *habitué* of Mlle. Le Marchand's *salon*, with Mme. Pitre for an intimate acquaintance. She was so innocently happy in the approaching exaltation of Denise, that Mlle. Le Marchand would not exclude her, though she saw that the little woman wearied Gaston considerably. M. and Mme. Rocca discreetly refrained from appearing when he was there, or his forbearance might have been over-tried; indeed, he manifested much

more surprise than pleasure on one occasion, when he found M. Rocca amiably helping Denise to manufacture paper flowers for the adornment of the ball-room of the Cercle. Contrary to his expectations, the moments he spent with his betrothed were those when painful thoughts had least hold upon him. Not that she had much to do with this, for she was apt to sit listening in silence, but the phantasies and sallies of Mlle. Le Marchand roused and interested him ; and though her uncouth appearance offended him whenever he noticed it, he was growing used to her. A lasting friendship was springing up between them ; they found common ground in the work into which he was beginning to throw himself. He had cast aside the collection of Provençal legends which it had been his delight for some months to make ; such food was now too light to satisfy his mind ; and besides, each legend had been related to Lucile, and was full of associations with her. Instead, he had transported himself into a world very unlike any which he knew from experience—that, namely, in which his ancestors Philippe de Farnoux, and Raymond, Philippe's son, had lived. For in their journals, carefully preserved in the family archives, he had discovered that he possessed a faithful picture of France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, from the Protestant point of view.

Philippe de Farnoux had lived before the Protestants of France had adopted that title. The journal called his fellow-believers in Germany "Protestants," but those in France "les fidèles," or "les évangéliques," and showed evidently that he himself belonged to the singular school of mystics which very early appeared in the French Reformed Church. Yet with this, there was still a touch of humour in his writing that showed him a fellow-countryman of Rabelais, and presented the abuses of the Roman Church in a light so ludicrous, that no sober reasoning would have been more fatal to them. This journal began in the early part of the reign of Louis XIV, when the policy of the Court was to win the Protestants by conciliation. As long as their religion had exposed them to danger, the Protestant nobles had stood firm; but under this system each day saw *soi-disant* conversions. The Rohan-Chabots, the Les Trémouille, the Châtillons, led the way; the *petite noblesse* followed, and as each name was recorded in the journal of Philippe de Farnoux, some brief pithy comment followed. Then came domestic entries, mingled with notices that told of coming troubles. The Protestants were forbidden to enter any learned profession—next, their ministers were ordered to quit the country in fifteen days; the temples were pulled down—"l'église est sous la

croix," wrote Philippe. An entry followed, showing the De Farnoux, even then, not to be overburdened with riches. Baron Philippe was evidently extremely incommoded by a new law, freeing all converts to the Roman Catholic Church from any debts they owed to those who remained Huguenots. A still greater trial was next recorded. A brother of the writer charged with the crime of assisting some Bordelais Protestants to escape from the kingdom, was cast into prison. Abjuration was to be the key that would open his cell. *Donc il y mourra*, wrote Philippe de Farnoux. Gaston sought in vain to discover whether this was so. A word or two here and there showed that his further fate was unknown to his brother.

The second journal began when the other ceased, and Raymond de Farnoux became the head of the house. In him Gaston found the man of action, rather than the thinker ; the enthusiasm that is as strong in failure as in success, and needs no hope to keep it alive. Beside the earnest faith of these men, Gaston's own life and time seemed singularly empty and poor. Till now, descendant of the De Farnoux though he was, he had known very little about the history of his Church ; these journals were like a revelation to him. When he spoke on the subject to Mlle. Le Marchand, she would buzz round him as if she had been one of those terrible

bees out of her favourite book, the “Ruche Romaine” of Marnix de Ste.-Aldegonde.

“Do you know three persons who believe anything enough to die for it?” she would ask. “I don’t. I lived in Paris forty years ago, and I’ve no illusions left. A woman here and there might—Denise would—but the men—bah! But there were men once who thought their lives a trifle, compared to their creed;” and then, traditions that she had heard in girlhood reviving in her mind, she would tell, with fierce energy, her recollections of the history of her own family;—her father, born in a cave of the Cevennes, on the very day that her grandfather was carried to the galleys of Toulon; while an uncle awaited his death at Montpellier, with—strange coincidence!—a De Farnoux for his companion. “They did not flinch on the scaffold, those two!” said she; “they smiled and embraced, giving each other *rendezvous* in heaven. Jacques Le Marchand was hung, and Paul de Farnoux beheaded, and so they died.”

The recollections of Mlle. Le Marchand greatly interested Gaston, and she was always ready with her narrative; but after a time his attention displeased her.

“It is to me, not my niece, that this young man pays his addresses,” she said; “though I am as-

suredly no Ninon, lovely as a girl when seventy years were over her head. This should not be; but, Denise, be not jealous, I'll give you half of him."

Denise smiled, and said, "There is no better way of pleasing me, than by appreciating you, dear aunt."

"I'm an old fool!" said Mlle. Le Marchand to herself. "If she cared for him, that speech would have been wormwood to her! Besides, his love is not mine to give, nor worth having, unless he gave it himself. M. Oreste, your attentions are very flattering, but I think, after the wedding, I shall find it necessary to see how my colza and beetroot are growing in Normandy. So we are to go to Aix?" she continued, aloud. "That is a kind proposal of the Duvals, and the girls will be your bridesmaids. The Baron, I suspect, would have had you marry Gaston at Marseilles, or Paris, out of the way of Farnousien pryers, but he must put up with a little disappointment. We will hope he knows nothing about it. And have you examined the *corbeille* carefully? Pitre was in raptures over it."

The *corbeille*, of course, was Gaston's affair, and he had begged Mme. Duval, the only female friend to whom he could apply, to order from Paris all the cachemeres, silks, lace, and etceteras, that

woman could desire. All Denise's young acquaintance came to see these marvels, whose fame went abroad through the town. These were happy days for Mme. Pitre and Thérézon. The latter had persuaded Denise to take her as her maid, and thought this almost better than being married herself. Gaston's commission to Mme. Duval had led to a most amiable invitation that the marriage should take place from the Duval house; and there was the additional reason that there was a temple at Aix, whose minister was a friend of Gaston's. There could be no assembly of friends at this wedding, for bride and bridegroom possessed very few. When they considered who ought to be invited, it appeared that neither had a near relation in the world except Mlle. Le Marchand and Mlle. de Farnoux. There might be some distant connections living in Normandy, but none who could be summoned on such an occasion. This discovery made Denise feel with new gratitude how precious a real home was to her.

Farnoux had the satisfaction of seeing the bridal party go to the *Mairie* to sign the civil contract, and of knowing what Denise wore; though, as usual on such occasions, the whole party wore only morning costume; but then, as Zon said, "How well mam'selle looked with a feather in her bonnet!" Which feather was more significant than may

at first sight appear, for it marked the approaching change in Denise's position, as unaffianced maidens in France never wear that ornament.

To Denise the civil ceremony was strange and trying. When she and Gaston stood before the Mayor, and signed the various legal documents necessary on such occasions, and replied with Gaston to the usual questions, it all seemed like a dream, with no reality in it;—Mlle. Le Marchand standing by the table, the Mayor behind it in his scarf of office, Gaston looking pale and stern beside her—all trembled and wavered as shadows would. That look of his remained fixed in her memory however. He breathed more freely when all was done, down to the congratulations of the Mayor, and the customary gift to the poor. The indissoluble bond between him and Denise was now fastened, and there was no room for more doubt. But she could hardly believe in it yet. They travelled to Aix the same day, with Mlle. Le Marchand; Denise very silent—hardly hearing even Gaston. For once outward things were unheeded by her, and when he said they were approaching Aix, and she leant forward and gazed, it was not to see the little city, lying in a hollow of the low white hills, but rather for breath; for the thought that the next day the ceremony, which she esteemed really her marriage, would take place, suddenly

overwhelmed her. A kind welcome awaited her; the two Demoiselles Duval welcomed her as an old friend, and won her back to smiles again. They took the liveliest interest in her *trousseau* and her marriage; but they watched Gaston with some wonder, and remarked to each other that he had grown older-looking, and much graver in the last three months. There was nothing to find fault with in his manner towards Denise; nay, he had hurried on the wedding, yet there was something in him that was unfamiliar and unintelligible. Marcellin, too, was most unusually serious; his sisters hardly knew him in this new character, and began to think a wedding a very *triste* affair.

Denise put on her bridal white the next day, and in the Temple, when she had clasped Gaston's hand in hers and promised to love and obey him, while he on his part vowed to cherish her through good and ill, "according to the duty of a Christian husband," she could believe that their joint life had begun.

"Que Dieu, notre Père céleste, vous comble, l'un et l'autre, de ses bénédicitions, et vous fasse la grâce de vivre ensemble longtemps et heureusement, dans sa crainte et dans son amour!"

What were the thoughts aroused by those concluding words in Gaston's mind? He looked down at his wife, and Denise raised so sweet a look to

him that a thrill of tenderness and compassion went through him, and for a moment he saw again in her the orphan cousin, whom he had desired to shelter and protect, and not the girl who had made a *mariage de convenance* with the owner of Château Farnoux.



CHAPTER XXVIII.



FEW months before, Denise had stood friendless in the streets of Farnoux. She now found herself mistress of that Château at which she had looked with such interest as she approached the town. Her energetic nature had made itself felt in every corner of her new domain ; from the *salon* to the *basse-cour* Denise was mistress ; she dealt with her southern household with a tact and spirit that reconciled them to her prompt government ; and she enjoyed having scope for her energy so much, that it seemed to her as if she had only just learnt what it was to live. Even into the dreary apartment of Mlle. de Farnoux she brought sunshine, and the care of the poor invalid fell daily, more and more, upon her, as Denise found that her voice and presence seemed to satisfy her when everything else failed. It had been an inexpressible shock when Gaston presented her to Mlle. de Farnoux. Denise had never recalled the look that had followed her in the chapel, without a shudder ; and she was almost

overcome when brought face to face with her aunt, though there was no violence, nothing but hopeless vacancy, and a sort of pleased smile and muttering when Gaston sought to make her comprehend that Denise was his wife.

"Oh, what a wreck! what a grievous sight!" Denise repeated, covering her face when she had left the room, and Gaston was startled and surprised to see her quite unable to recover herself. It was always very hard for Denise to regain her composure on the rare occasions when it gave way, but his distress that he had exposed her to such a shock restored it.

"If it be possible on earth, she must indeed have expiated whatever she did amiss," said Denise. "All those years of solitary disappointment ending in this!" and a profound compassion filled her heart, and left no room for shrinking or dislike. At first when Denise used to visit her, Mlle. de Farnoux would evince uneasiness, watch her, and soon signify a wish to be left alone; but rather as if reminded of some one or something that she had disliked at a former time, than as if feeling any present aversion to Denise. After a while, however, she used to send for her, and when she came would give orders to her in the imperious way, which no doubt she had used with Géraldine and Féline; or else seem only to have wanted to bring her into the

room. Denise, who had never known the depths of grief or sin, had, nevertheless, a pitying tenderness to both that an angel might have felt. The sin was abhorrent to her, but the sinner called forth her deepest compassion. All that she had heard of the harsh tyranny of Mlle. de Farnoux only caused her to deal more gently with her; "she is stricken of God," she said low to Gaston, when he marvelled at the peculiar feeling with which she regarded their aunt. But it was such a strain on her powers to cheer and amuse Mlle. de Farnoux day by day, as he had never dreamt of. The outbreaks that grew more and more rare, were almost less trying than the daily sight of failing intellect. Denise would brace herself up to quiet and soothe her, and at last find only vacant looks, half-finished sentences, and meaningless gestures.

It was a gloomy commencement of married life, and a look of care began to haunt the eyes hitherto so peaceful. But, after all, this was not owing to the poor invalid, in whose apartment Denise was now always welcome, and she knew it. There was only one part of the Château where she was not at home, and that was the library, where Gaston sat habitually. He had transferred his own books to it, and read and wrote there more than half the day. Once Denise had come in, but he raised his head with surprise that seemed to ask what she

wanted ; there was a look of dissatisfaction, gone instantly, but she saw it. She never disturbed his solitude again. And the question began to haunt her, “ Why cannot he love me ? ” She felt that she knew even less of her husband now than before their marriage. He saw her glad and cheerful, delighting in her new position, and his judgment of her was confirmed ; he thought his part of their compact fulfilled, and esteemed himself at liberty to withdraw to his own thoughts and pursuits. Denise felt keenly that every day made them more like strangers, though his kindness left no room for complaint—but there is sometimes nothing more bitter than kindness. She found herself constantly wondering what he was like before she knew him, and how she could please him ; and meanwhile she grew timid, and doubtful what he would have her say or do. But one substantial subject on which to claim his attention still gave her courage. To it he always listened with interest, though often with a smile. He had his views of what his position as the representative of an old Protestant family required ; but they had not much resemblance to hers. Her schemes were apt to be of a very practical nature, requiring a great deal of exertion in carrying them out, and were exceedingly unlike any that would have arisen amid Gaston’s world of books. This world of his, once all-sufficient, was becoming

less and less so to him ; he was near that perilous moment when a man looks on life in discouragement, and asks himself what it avails, and whither it is tending. All unconsciously Denise delayed this moment by calling him into the midst of wholesome, every-day matters. She would come and say, “*Mon ami*, I have been thinking whether some better way of crushing the grapes could not be found than those *pressoirs*, against which the men bruise themselves black and blue. I want you to write to M. Duval and ask if there is no other machine. Will you ?”

“ Certainly ; but all the effect will be that they will positively refuse to use your machine, if it exists, and you will be told that it will not work, or ‘ our fathers used the *pressoirs*, and we are no wiser than they.’ ”

“ But you will write, Gaston, and make them try some new way, at least on your estate. And the new kind of orange that we are to graft—”

Gaston laughed. “ Undaunted, in spite of old Jean’s opposition !”

Denise had remonstrated a day or two before with her gardener for not procuring a better kind of orange than that universal at Farnoux, and he had replied, “*Nous autres*, we have always been accustomed to graft a tree from the one next it.”

“ Yes,” replied Denise, persevering ; “ and there

is something else much more important. Do you not think M. Bertin would come here oftener?"

M. Bertin was the *pasteur* who occasionally preached in the chapel to his scanty flock.

"I had thought of that myself."

"I am glad . . . Surely these people will forget to pray if they are reminded of it only every three months. Our service at London is the one thing there that I regret."

"You must not try conversion, my dear Denise; the Romanist clergy here are equally intolerant and unenlightened—"

"I do not want to convert; but if we could at least teach a little truth! Imagine Zon. She has seen me reading the Bible, and has sometimes asked me to read her something out of it. She listens with great interest, but it seems to me that she has no idea what it *is*. When I read of the punishment of Lot's wife, she burst out laughing, and exclaimed, 'But the poor woman! one must pity her! Exchange the town, where no doubt there were shops, and *fêtes*, and a carnival, and much amusement, for the country—all the family were going to live in the country, were they not? *Tenez*, I should have looked back—I should have done like her!'"

"Yes, Zon's Bible are the pictures in the church of Ste.-Dévote; such as she need a teaching that

speaks to the eye. I recollect once seeing two women come into Ste.-Geneviève, at Paris, and stand before a fresco of St. Martin sharing his cloak with the beggar; one, who knew the story, began relating it to the other with a *naïveté* that was worthy of the first ages of faith."

"But there is nothing real in all that, Gaston!"

"It is what the ignorant are fit for."

"No one can be fitted to live on what is untrue."

"Who shall say what truth is, Denise?"

"What your ancestors lived and died for. Oh, it would be too miserable to doubt, for nothing in all the world has any worth but that!"

He saw that she entirely meant what she said. Her eyes had that far-away gaze that Zon had remarked; the smile on her lips was at once triumphant and peaceful. Neither pain nor joy, honour nor dishonour, weighed with her in the balance against what she meant by truth. Many a time, already, had he wondered at the child-like faith that esteemed all things simply as right or wrong. He thought it was her secluded life that had kept her heart so pure, and her creed so simple; and smiled between scorn and sadness to think what would become of both when they had to do battle with the world.

"Your speaking of M. Duval reminds me that

Marcellin proposes coming here to-day," he said, presently; and she, who had been watching him wistfully, gave a cry of joy, and with glad looks enquired how long he could stay. Gaston satisfied her, and remarked that she and Marcellin had always been great allies.

"I am enchanted that he is coming," she answered, with a warmth that surprised him still more, for to him timidity made her manner appear cold, and he could not guess that half her pleasure in the prospect of seeing Marcellin arose from the hope that he could tell her all she wanted to know about Gaston. She went away to arrange her occupations, so as to have a leisure afternoon. She was always busy now, and especially when, as on this day, Mme. Pitre was to give her a music lesson. Long before this she had learnt all that the little woman could teach her, but she continued to receive instructions from her, and paid well for them, as the easiest way of increasing Mme. Pitre's scanty income. Denise had at first gone down to Maison Rocca to take her lessons, but she found that Mme. Pitre thought going to Château Farnoux such honour, that she was quite mortified by Denise's attempt to spare her the toilsome walk.

So she had her own way, and Denise used the pretext of distance and paid for the lessons at a treble rate. Little Louis Rocca often came with

Mme. Pitre, and sometimes remained for several days. He had always been a great pet of Denise, and Gaston, remembering that Lucile had admired and caressed the child, made a favourite of him, and treated him with something of the same tenderness which had once been Lucile's. Many a time a pang thrilled through Denise, as she longed to have that look and smile addressed to her.



CHAPTER XXIX.



ARCELLIN DUVAL arrived sooner than he was expected ; Gaston was not at home, and Denise had to do the honours of the Château. Her welcome gratified Marcellin, who thought to himself that she was a châtelaine born, and ten times more bewitching than that pretty little silly thing Lucile, so wrapt up in Gaston that she never had a look for any one but him ! As Gaston did not appear, Denise proposed that they should go in search of him. Marcellin wished for nothing better than to make an excursion with Denise for his guide, and she did not trouble herself just then to consider whether etiquette permitted it or not. As they set out he began, “ So I find you fully established as Lady of Farnoux, without an idea of residing in Paris ! Is it possible ? ”

“ Yes. Gaston once suggested Paris, but he seemed to care little about it.”

“ You are going to bury yourself *en province*, then ? ”

"It is where we ought to be, since Gaston is master of Château Farnoux. I cannot think where those are who should be our country gentlefolks!"

"Ask the great revolution!"

"Ah, I suppose that as a body the French aristocracy perished then. But still there must be families who spend part of the year in Paris, and part in the country. I should like some time or other to do so."

"And the woman who has lived in Paris can never live anywhere else. You smile! but it is an ascertained fact. No woman really loves the country; they go there to economise or sulk; but they soon fly back to the town. I am convinced that women are born with a natural antipathy to the country."

"I would never go to Paris if I believed all that."

"And do you hope to make a country gentleman of your husband? He, an author, with his foot on the first step of the ladder of fame—the pen is as strong as the sword to carve out a career. Do you think he will not sigh for the battle-field of ideas at Paris? In the country we all vegetate; in Paris, you know, *l'esprit court dans les rues.*"

"If it is always running about the streets, that may explain why very often there is so little in books," said Denise.

“ You are determined to show me that wit inhabits the country as well as the capital. But are you serious in believing you can spend your life happily here? or Gaston either? You have *réunions* of friends; you visit the neighbouring châteaux; but you are too inaccessible to have any real society, unless you gather friends who can remain some days at a time. As for Farnoux itself——”

“ Oh, that I know is hopeless.”

“ Decidedly, Gaston would hardly find congenial society at the Cercle—but you know nothing of that institution but its balls.”

“ Oh, I know it meets above a chemist’s shop, and I have an idea that the drugs and the coffee are prepared together. I suppose the arrangements are *des plus simples*—and people play cards and billiards, and smoke. One would meet a good many MM. Rocca, *n’est-ce pas?*”

“ Precisely. You yourself are an experienced whist-player?”

“ Certainly; since I came to Farnoux I have learnt to play *sixette* and *quatrète*, as well as how to cook snails, and a *bouille-abaisse*. ”

“ That is what one learns *en province*, you see!”

“ But, Marcellin, we must live here. Everything combines to show it; all our work is here; you cannot say that Gaston will write less well

because he lives in the country ; and, besides, men are not made only to write books.”

“ You treat authorship with small reverence.”

“ I think it is a great gift ; but I imagine a man should act as well as write. Surely he must live heartily for others—let him write the thoughts and feelings that come to him ; but he cannot shut himself up and say, ‘ I will live to write.’ Else he would look on everything as so much material for his next poem !”

“ You have said all this to Gaston ? Egeria must have spoken to ill-pleased ears ! What did he say ?”

“ Oh, I never said all this as I have done now. I should not have had courage.”

“ You are not afraid of me, then ?”

“ Oh, no ! I know that nothing I said could annoy you ; and I should not care particularly if you liked it or not. You would forget all about it directly.”

“ There you are mistaken, madame. I never forget anything you say. It is too unlike the remarks of other people.”

“ I will tell you another reason why we must stay here. Mlle. de Farnoux——”

“ Ah ! How do you get on with her ?”

“ She likes having me near her, but it is so sad !” said Denise, with a visible shudder. “ I am not

afraid now, but it haunts me at night. Marcellin, how strange it is that some faults are so terribly punished, and others so slightly! Life is very puzzling when one begins to think about it!"

"*L'onde et l'abîme ont un mystère,
Que nul mortel ne pénétra ;
C'est Dieu qui leur dit de se taire
Jusqu'au jour où tout parlera,*"

was Marcellin's reply. Denise had never heard the lines before; they impressed her strongly.

"Yes, one knows nothing!" she answered. "But one can wait. When once it is clear, how simple it will all seem, as all our puzzles do when they are explained. But now it does seem singular that such a weight of punishment should fall on some! There are two people whose history I should so much like to know——"

"Your two aunts?"

"Yes."

"I have heard that Mlle. de Farnoux was on the point of marriage with that M. de Videlle who distinguished himself in Mexico. No one knows whether he or she broke it off. Fortunate man!"

"I think that, happy, she might have been so different. But there would always have been the violent temper. Imagine—I roused it last Sunday by putting on a coloured apron—you know I had

just left off my mourning. It seems that it used to be a custom among the Huguenots to wear black on Sundays, though I suppose no one does so now ; but she recollects this, and her fury was what I cannot describe ! And yet generally now she is so passive.”

“ Where is that excellent woman, Mlle. Le Marchand ? ”

“ Oh, imagine my vexation when I found the other day she had gone away quite suddenly, leaving a message with Mme. Pitre that I might write to her in Normandy ! ”

“ I am always reminded, when I hear of her, of what a friend said to the Chevalier de Boufflers, meeting him on the highway : ‘ Je suis charmé de vous trouver chez vous.’ Of course you have no idea when Mlle. Le Marchand will return ? ”

“ None, and I did so wish her to see how happy I am. Why do you look at me ? ”

“ It is so agreeable to see happy people. An idea occurs to me ; you see we do not find Gaston —have you yet visited the chapel of Ste.-Agnesca ? No ? Let us go there, then ; he is as likely to be there as anywhere.”

Denise laughed, and consented. They turned towards the grotto. There had been heavy rain during the night, and voices of countless little rills were babbling in every nook of the hills, hastening to join

the swollen turbid torrent that rolled through the glen, and spread a carpet of mud far out on the sea. The clouds were yet lingering in the horizon, and the distant hills were purple and the sea grey. Myrtle and cistus-bushes almost hid the unfrequented path to the grotto, but it grew more distinct on the barer ground, as Denise and Marcellin ascended and verdure grew scantier. The view over the sea became more extensive, and headland after headland, bay after bay appeared before them, till a sudden turn led them among hills that shut out the view behind, and in front suddenly appeared the deep opening of the grotto, or *beaumo*, the patois name for such caverns. The porous limestone was worn all around the entrance by sun and frost into a fantastic fretwork, and within all was dark, at least to eyes that came out of full daylight. The ear caught the sound of a little stream that rose in the grotto, and trickled slowly into a natural basin in the rock, fringed with maidenhair-fern. Gradually the eye could perceive a stone altar, with the irregular petrifactions that popular fancy had converted into tapers set on it; a rude crucifix had been placed there by some pious hand, no one knew when. Minor details could soon be distinguished; initials cut on the sides of the cave, and a handful of half-withered flowers on the altar.

"*Croix d'amour*," said Marcellin, smiling, as he lifted and replaced the faded cresses. "An offering from some love-stricken maiden."

"*Croix d'amour*! is it so they call them? What an ominous name!" said Denise, touching them in her turn.

"Ominous! Sombre natures like yours might perhaps take that view of them. It would never have occurred to me. Now, you will imagine some touching history of love chequered and oppressed—What are you seeking?"

"You said Gaston cut his name here long ago."

"I will show you our initials, cut years ago, with a blank left for the name of the future adored one."

"Room for how many did you leave?"

"Ah, malicious one! I am fidelity itself till the beloved herself changes. Then how can I continue to love, when she is no more what once charmed me?"

"Did he ever bring Mlle. de Lux here?"

"What could have suggested such an idea to you?"

"I once heard him say she was the most beautiful woman he ever saw."

Marcellin looked at her smiling, but Denise did not smile.

"Cupid must have effaced my initials," said he, avoiding the question, with his old love of teasing.
"No, here!"—

"Those must be Gaston's," said Denise, pointing to where, amid all the letters of the alphabet, or the more ambitious attempts of scholars who had carved whole names, appeared a deep-cut G. de F. Marcellin looked, and started with dismay, for he was not aware that since the boyish visit to the cave of which he had spoken, Gaston had made another with a different companion.

"L. G.! That I should have brought her here to see that! She who took fire at a solitary mention of a handsome woman!"

"Are those Lucile Gautier's?" said Denise, as if in answer to his thought. "Gaston brought her here then—" and there was a startled look, gone, however, immediately. "I only saw her twice, but I always wished to know her. I always wonder how Gaston could help loving so pretty a creature. Was Mlle. de Lux as charming?"

"Are you doing her the honour to be jealous?"
Denise made a gesture as if offended.

"Pardon! I will not name her again."

"But I wish much to hear of her," said Denise, with simplicity that pleased Marcellin. "I know so little of my husband, and I want to understand what he likes."

"You must not be jealous of his past life; no man likes that."

"I do not think I am. For instance, I have no silly fears lest he should have loved Lucile; because I know that if he had he would have married her. Every one knew how much her mother wished it, and that she was so angry he did not, that she left the Château."

"You may be at rest, then. As for Mlle. de Lux, he never saw her but once, and never cared a rush for her."

"Ah, I am glad to know it was only my fancy—and after all, my husband would not love me in that manner."

"In what manner?"

"Of course," she answered, with grave simplicity, "I know that married people are friends, not lovers; he told me so himself before we married; but I often am afraid I am not clever enough for Gaston."

"Bah! he ought to see that you are adorable."

"Thank you," she answered, much amused at the earnestness with which he uttered the compliment. "I am glad Gaston's best friend should think so."

"Whether Gaston does so or not now, be sure he will some day."

"I should be very glad to think that, Marcellin!"

Denise had seen enough of Marcellin to become intimate with him, and their friendship was very real. She still considered him as a rattle-pated boy, but at the same time relied on his brotherly affection and good sense to an extent of which she was hardly aware ; and Gaston had observed that she never hesitated to claim from Marcellin a hundred little services, which she never asked from himself. With Marcellin she was as gay, as with Gaston she was timid and silent. Gaston failed not to observe this, but never guessed the true explanation of the difference of her manner to him and to his friend. Marcellin himself knew perfectly well that the whole secret lay in her certainty of his honest friendship for her ; and wishing for nothing beyond, he began to lay sagacious schemes for piquing Gaston into jealousy, as the best way of awakening him to a sense of his wife's merits. All unconscious of his good intentions, she came out of the grotto, and sat down on the stone pedestal of a grey old cross, which some hand—probably the same that laid the cresses on the altar—had garlanded with leaves and flowers.

Marcellin lay on the ground below, twisting a bit of arbutus in his fingers, and inwardly giving thanks that she had thought so little of Lucile's initials. He returned to a safe subject by saying,

"And so Mlle. Le Marchand is on her travels again. And Cocotte?"

"Of course, but do not laugh at Cocotte. She was the means of introducing me to Mrs. Lisle."

"Your adopted mother?"

"Yes. She has often told me about it. My family were in the greatest poverty, and at last my aunt resolved to sell Cocotte."

"I wonder she did not rather sell her niece!"

"I daresay she would, only it was easier to find a purchaser for the bird. So she put up a great placard in our window, 'To sell; a parrot, speaking French and English.' Mrs. Lisle used to come and see a servant of hers ill in the house where we lodged; she saw this placard, and being fond of birds, inquired about it. Besides, she felt sure no English person had written the advertisement."

"She was herself French?"

"From Blois. Her husband met with her while he was studying French there."

"A widow?"

"Not when we first knew her. She did not buy Cocotte, but she was very kind to us, and for some years paid for my schooling. I went to a school kept by an old French lady and her daughter—it had been established long ago for the children of refugee Huguenots."

"Do you mean such institutions still survive in London?"

"Oh yes; but you know it is now the children of French tradespeople, and so on, who frequent them. The mistress I speak of escaped from France in the Revolution, and was very glad to gain a livelihood thus. Mrs. Lisle never became at all English, and anything French was always welcome to her, and I believe she was very kind to the old lady."

"Well, how long did you remain there?"

"Seven years. My aunt was wandering about, and did not want me. Then Mr. Lisle, who was a rich banker, died, and his widow took me to live with her."

"And with her you spent eight years?"

"Yes. It was not gay. I see you think it must have been insupportably dull—but I was happy."

"You were very fond of this good Mrs. Lisle, then?"

"I was grateful—yes, and fond of her, for she was very kind, but she was not a person to love passionately."

"Do you know what 'to love passionately,' means?"

Denise's thoughts turned to Gaston; she coloured and answered, "For all you have told

me about Marie Leclerc and—others, Marcellin ! I don't think you know either."

Marcellin protested against this, and the confidences which he proceeded to make would have greatly amused a third party. Denise was a good listener, a charm he had early discovered. Here, he said, he had found a third sister, with none of the prosaic associations of infancy ; no recollections of *tartines*, screams, and scratches, to mar the poetry of the relationship. He had arrived in the midst of the history of his last *grande passion*, which, like all the others, was very serious while it lasted ; and Denise had just given way to a joyous and cruel laugh, when the *tête-à-tête* was interrupted by the sudden appearance of Gaston. Marcellin, in pursuance of his schemes, put on an air of suppressed emotion ; Denise, without any feigning, became grave at once ; and Gaston, whom old associations had induced to visit the grotto, was confounded to find her there. Marcellin was delighted at this propitious commencement, but thought it as well to explain how he and Denise came there.

"I found your initials," said Denise to her husband, "and will you tell me if those below are not Mlle. Gautier's ?"

Gaston looked at Marcellin, but there had evidently been no treachery. He answered, "They are," and stood for a few moments beside Denise,

who had risen, and gone into the cave to point them out. A flood of recollections came over him. She was about to say she should like to add hers, when, looking up at his face, she saw there the same look that had sunk into her memory at the *mairie*. She could not read it now any more than then ; but a vague suspicion came into her mind, which would have been defined, but for her mistaken belief that Gaston had actually refused to marry Lucile ; for so ran Farnoux gossip. She turned in silence to leave the cave.

“*Nous dansons sur un volcan !*” thought Marcellin.

Gaston knew that he had been near betraying himself. He made amends for having yielded to thoughts that he had firmly resolved to banish, by treating his wife with marked attention as they returned home. Denise had never till she married known the luxury of being guarded and cared for ; it was particularly delightful to one who had been only used to the measured kindness of a benefactor. As she leant on Gaston’s arm, with Marcellin to give her courage, she was gayer than Gaston had believed it was in her nature to be. Marcellin had not seen them for several months, and had many questions to ask, and she compelled him to listen for the answers, which was more than most people could do ; and Gaston was amused at the peremptory

way in which she treated him ; but he was at the same time slightly dissatisfied. He called Marcellin to account, between jest and earnest, when they were alone together, and demanded what he and Denise always found to say to each other.

“ We converse on a subject which I do not choose to tell you.”

“ Excuse my curiosity,” said Gaston, laughingly. “ It is unjustifiable—I know your fascinations ; I am not so blind as you think, bah !—and I appear, as you know, when least expected.”

“ Ah, you disturbed a delightful *tête-à-tête*. You have a pearl of a wife, of whom you are perfectly unworthy !”

“ Thanks, *mon cher*. You are about to tell me that you adore her, eh ?”

“ That should be your part ; but I own I have already told her so.”

“ For the future leave me to act my part myself,” said Gaston, still in jest, but more hastily than he intended ; for his own affection and esteem for Marcellin made him quick to believe that his devotion, sportive as it was, might be dangerous to the peace of a young wife whose heart was unoccupied.

“ Gaston !” said Marcellin, suddenly serious. “ I have something to say to you.”

“ Say on !”

“ We are old friends——”

“ Old enough to speak frankly to each other.”

“ Well—here I am stranded—as much at a loss as if we were strangers. I have no idea why you married Denise. There must be some mystery in the affair. I should have sworn that when you married you would have given something more than a name and a ring! Why, I myself—” he added, becoming vehement as Gaston only smiled and lighted a cigar—“ I, who am a matter-of-fact, prosaic animal, have nevertheless my ideas on this subject. If I married, I would give my whole confidence, my entire affection. I would not use up the best part of my life, and then submit to marriage as a necessary evil. You did not precisely do that, but——”

“ Enough, *mon cher*. *Brisons là*. You said all that at Aix.”

“ This girl is full of that covered fire that burns hottest. When she learns that you love Lucile——”

“ Stop there, Marcellin.” And then, as if for once the hidden bitterness overflowed, Gaston exclaimed, “ You talk of fire—I have seen nothing but ice. You are right in saying that no man ever looked forward more than I to that thing, whose name has become a standing jest among us—marriage. I saw in it all that you say, and more; it represented life-long affection, trust, protection on one side, fond reliance on the other. The whole

dream vanished. A dead man came between me and Lucile. Then, like a fool, I thought to reconstruct my vision, in a measure tried to realise it in Denise. She herself, one moment too late, showed me the absurdity of my hope."

" You found you could not satisfy her!"

" I found," said Gaston, " that her ideal was a certain position in the world ; she never for an instant thought love necessary. I would have told her the whole truth, when she silenced me by her cool business view of the affair. She is excellent, conscientious, truthful—and, as long as she reigns supreme, she will be perfectly content."

" You think so?"

" I am convinced of it. As for Lucile—let the past sleep. Now we will have done with all this."

" I observe that a man usually enters on married life by quarrelling with his old friends," said Marcellin, " this is just the opportunity."

" I cannot afford to quarrel with you. The past is dead. The present I will deal with as I can. Denise is admirable ; I esteem and trust her entirely—is that nothing ? For myself, I had imagined a different life, but many a man finds himself living out an existence just the opposite of what he had looked for, and yet endures it very equably."

" *Parbleu!* you forget that two people, unless they are both made of marble, cannot live together

connected by the closest ties without loving or hating each other!"

"Bah! Look at half the married people you know!"

"Unless they have gone through an awful discipline first, neither men nor women resign themselves easily to a joyless life; and these are not times when, if you happen to dislike your wife, you can go on pilgrimage, or find out she is your cousin and divorce her!"

Gaston made no answer; he was thinking of his mother's history, and that recollection always made him gloomy.

"There is a lefthandedness in the affairs of men that vexes me horribly!" muttered Marcellin to himself. "To think that he cannot see she has given him her heart! and love like hers is not so easily come by, that one could afford to throw it away!"



CHAPTER XXX.

BY a master-stroke of policy, Mme. Rocca had persuaded the uncle and godfather of little Louis, an abbé well-to-do in the world, to undertake the expense of the child's education. He was soon, therefore, to go away to Montpellier, where the uncle lived, and Denise would lose her little pet and scholar. M. Rocca and Denise lamented over the separation, but no reasonable objection could be made. Mme. Rocca had schemed very cleverly for her little son, and was quite reconciled to parting with him, by thinking of how many francs she should save by escaping the expense of his education. She was always so calmly triumphant in her parsimony, that she had quite persuaded her neighbours to look on it as a virtue. Louis had come for a last visit to the Château, and informed Denise that he should be very glad to become a "collégien," for he was quite tired of his papa and mamma, and wanted to go away and see something new. He did not even pretend to be sorry to leave

Denise, and yet she was grieved to lose the little monkey, and kept him by her side and let him chatter as he liked. He had nearly lost his shyness, and would challenge Marcellin, who could make friends with any child, to a romp, or call on Gaston to hold his hand while he walked all along the top of the parapet-wall of the terrace. Had any one but Gaston held him, Denise would not have permitted this exploit, for the parapet rose sheer above the valley, and few heads but swam to look down that dizzy height. Louis was the fonder of this exploit from a suspicion that it alarmed her; and when they all came in from their expedition to the chapel of Ste.-Agnesca he ran to meet them, and beg Gaston to put him on the wall. Denise was well pleased when he was contented to return, and sit at Gaston's feet on the terrace and watch the owls—*Bèn l'oli*—as he called them, fly round the Château. Denise was sitting near, and Marcellin leant against the parapet. The evening mists were rising in the valley far below, and lingering round the pine-trees in the hills, but the sky was clear and bright with stars.

“And so,” continued Louis, who was inclined to take more than his fair share of conversation, “Mamma said I should go, because she could not leave me with Toinoun, and she locked up all the cupboards; and papa borrowed uncle Henri’s little

carriage, and we drove a long way, till we came to Costabelle."

"Little magpie! I daresay you saw no miracles there!" said Marcellin, with vexation that surprised Denise and Gaston. "What do you think you will see when you go to Montpellier, eh?"

"When I go to Montpellier, I shall be a *cler-joun* (chorister) and learn to sing. I can sing now; Zon has taught me."

"Let us hear," said Gaston, amused at the idea of the boy's education as an ecclesiastic being commenced by Zon.

Accordingly, Louis began to sing a cantique in patois, celebrating the glories of Paradise, to the tune of "Charmante Gabrielle :"

" Demoron ravissent
Aimable Paradis,
O qu'uno amo es contento
Qu'enfin de tu jouïs—"

When, suddenly breaking off, he returned to his former topic with, "And we got to Costabelle, three whole leagues from Farnoux, and what do you think was the first thing I saw there? The pretty lady!"

"It is getting too cold to stay here," interrupted Marcellin.

"Cold!" said Denise, laughing. "It is only

that you like hearing no one's voice but your own ; does he, Gaston ? What pretty lady, Louis ? ”

“ The one I saw here when I came to mass with you and Misé Marchand. And she saw us, and said she was come to stay at the *bastide* near the village with her sister-in-law, because she was ill, and she kissed me, and asked when I was here last.”

“ Why, he must mean Mlle. Gautier—Mme. Luchet, I ought to say—your cousin Lucile, Gaston ? We must go to visit her,” said Denise, looking up to Gaston. “ I wonder if M. Luchet—”

She stopped abruptly.

“ She said she was ill,” added Louis, “ but she did not look so. Why is she not here now ? I asked her, and I said she must come back, for I like her.”

“ Indeed, you little vagabond ! ” said Marcellin, laughing, but his eye all the time on Denise.

“ I do, and she gave me a *canesteleto* (little basket) full of fruit, and she kissed me, and I love her very much.”

Gaston rose hastily, raised the child in his arms, and kissed his forehead. Then, sitting him down, he walked away. In the rush of feelings awakened by learning that Lucile was so near, he forgot all but her—forgot that Denise was in existence. She stood stricken with swift conviction ; all the vague

doubts and fears that had been floating in her mind were crystallized as by an electric spark. She turned to Marcellin as if to speak, with an appealing, piteous look ; then with a great effort rallied, and tried to make some trifling remark. Marcellin knew that to meddle here was more than perilous, but his sincere affection for her would not let him hold aloof.

“ Denise !—Yes, I know that I have no business to interfere, you need not tell me that,” he said, speaking English, that Louis might not understand. “ You think, as your aunt once said, that I am like St.-Antony’s pig, who poked his nose everywhere ! No matter. I see how it will be. I would be silent if you were an ordinary sort of person ; but you are not. You do not play on the piano, you do not cry, you do nothing, like other women. You brood and think, and say nothing. Listen to me. I have known Gaston all my life—”

“ And Lucile ?”

“ And Lucile most of it. A pretty, very pretty child—a plaything. Gaston loved her. You see I speak truth—”

“ Say *loves* then, Marcellin.”

“ Loves, then, if you will ; yet he did not marry her. He chose you.”

“ He did !” she said, with sighing wonder.

“ He will end by loving you better than he ever

did Lucile Gautier, for you have more love to give in return."

"I never thought of love; you know that. It is not that I am jealous, indeed. But, O Marcellin! he is very unhappy!"—and there was a pause.

"That is all she thinks of!" said Marcellin, to himself. "But that cannot last. When I heard that Lucile had gone to Costabelle, I foresaw all would soon be known, but to think that that little atom—" he regarded Louis with comic disgust—"should have been the match to blow up the mine! I never believed myself intended by nature for a tragic actor, yet it seems to me that I have got a rôle in something that is astonishingly likely to turn to tragedy! And if she once falls in love she will have no more sympathy to bestow on me—love is a horridly egotistical thing! What is she thinking of, I wonder, standing there with her eyes cast down, and holding Louis' hand? A statue could not be stiller. What a beautiful countenance it is, *selon moi*, and yet nobody agrees with me!"

"And I can do nothing! Nothing!" said Denise, breaking silence at last. "That is hard. If he would but once tell me what it all means, and if I could make him happier, I should be satisfied. I must wait till I know him better."

It is said that there exists a certain elf-king of

the name of Tolf, who has no power over mortals unless called by name, but when once named he can never be exorcised. It is often so with thoughts. For some time an undefined fear had hovered round Denise, and now it had taken shape. Before Marcellin left Château Farnoux he saw that her timidity had changed into a devouring anxiety, and that she was fast becoming absorbed by the question how to win the love of her husband, who all the time was unaware of having betrayed himself, and fancied—occupied by other thoughts and feelings—that he and Denise were still on their old footing of calm friendship.

Elastic as his spirits were, Marcellin left Château Farnoux sadly enough.



CHAPTER XXXI.



P to this time nothing had ever stirred the depths of Denise's nature, and her feelings were fresh as a child's, and strong as a woman's. Marcellin had rightly said, she was like covered fire ; it had burst out now and she hardly knew herself. She was continually craving for her husband's presence, and yet, when with him, she longed for nothing so much as to escape again. She now never appeared to so little advantage as in his presence, occupied as she was in watching his looks, and uncertain of pleasing him. The dread, too, that sooner or later some meeting with Lucile would re-awaken all the old feelings, if indeed they slept, haunted even her dreams ; and she woke, morning after morning, from visions that might well leave her unrefreshed. It was a mystery to her why Gaston had married her ; Marcellin himself was equally ignorant ; but she came near the truth in surmising that it was done in the bitterness of disappointment, when, for

reasons unknown to her, Lucile could not be his. She saw now that he had long loved his beautiful cousin ; and, though she trusted Gaston with all her own generous heart, and never doubted but that he was putting this love away from him with his whole strength, her courage drooped before the enterprise of winning a pre-occupied heart. They would meet, they must meet, and then—beyond that she could not go. This terror was never absent from her mind ; her thoughts would perpetually run on it, while she sat with Mlle. de Farnoux, or superintended her household, or visited her poultry and silk-worms at the farm in the valley below the Château.

It was too true that already the old combat in Gaston's heart was fiercer than ever ; not only had Louis betrayed Lucile's neighbourhood, but she, in her childish rashness, had confirmed the intelligence by a note, imploring him to come and hear why she had married her cousin. He dared not trust himself to a meeting. On the contrary, he forced himself in every way to realise that they were utterly and for ever parted ; he shunned solitude, sought to make a constant companion of Denise, devised means of carrying out her innovations, little as he found himself caring for them ; and of an evening he read to her the result of his day's labour upon the old journals and memoirs, which

he purposed publishing, with notes, as a contribution to the history of the Reformed Church in France. Gaston had ambition, but the time was one when a conscientious man found it very difficult to act. The *coup d'état* had just taken place, and Gaston, while thoroughly averse to the ruler of France and the means which he had taken of arriving at power, could not but see that liberty and order depended on his retaining possession of the throne. A Legitimist at heart, he yet felt all the arguments brought forward by the other parties too strongly to be a warm adherent of Henri Cinq ; and, moreover, a Protestant who had studied the history of his country could have little love for a priest-ridden king. Literature was therefore his natural resource, especially as he knew well that, as Marcellin said, the pen has carved out the career of many a statesman in France. Authorship had hitherto been his pastime ; it was becoming his business ; and this labour of his among the records of his ancestors was after Denise's own heart ; she entered with enthusiasm into the researches which he found necessary, and brought a clear-headedness and good sense to bear upon them, which he found not a little useful to him. With this subject in common they were sometimes so much at ease together that they might for a little while have believed theirs a happy marriage ; but too soon some trifle would dispel

the dream ; Gaston would smile in mockery of himself, and Denise shrink from

“ The pang all other pangs above,
Of kindness counterfeiting absent love.”

And that was all she should know in her married life ! and she, who beforehand, like almost every girl in Farnoux, looked on marriage as such a simple, common-place affair, now could not endure the very friendship which she had desired.

“ Oh, if he had but loved me, we might have been so happy ! Even now I think he is beginning to like me ; but they will meet, and then —then !”

She had been murmuring the old thought to herself, as she came back from the orange garden, where Gaston had remained, to see to some alteration in the cistern that watered both his ground and that of several other proprietors. Denise stood still in the door-way of the Château, feeling as if turned into stone, for before her eyes was the fair spectre that haunted her—no vision, but in bodily presence—Lucile herself stood in the hall. There they faced each other ; and Lucile saw in Denise Gaston’s wife, while Denise beheld in Lucile the woman whom Gaston loved. Neither spoke for a moment ; then, as if expecting Denise would seek to banish her, Lucile exclaimed defiantly, “ Is my

cousin not here ?" and she laid a stress on the title of relationship.

Now that the dreaded moment was come, Denise's first wild feeling was, that while she lived, those two should never meet. Then she knew herself impotent to prevent it. She turned a look of such dumb despair on her rival, that Lucile, in all her agitation, was scared. She had never imagined that the woman who was Gaston's wife could look thus.

"Are you unhappy, too?" she said.

"Unhappy!—Oh, why are you come here?"

"Do you love him, then?"

"Yes!" said Denise, out of a heart that seemed breaking.

"Does he love you?" cried Lucile, hastily.

"If he saw me dead this moment, he would only say, 'My aunt will miss her!'"

"Ah! he loves me still!" cried Lucile, with a flash of triumph.

"And if he does, what then? Oh, you were merciless when you came to-day. The past is so past for Gaston and you, that even to think of reviving it is sin. You have brought misery for us all. There is nothing on earth left for you but to forget each other. Why are you here?"

"You may speak severely, but you do not know my wretchedness!"

"Am I then so happy?" said Denise bitterly. "Seas between us could not part me from my husband, more than your standing here. Lucile, if you know what it is to love him, go back, and do not ask to see him, even though I know you can mean only a last farewell."

"It is! it is so. I will never come again, but I must say that! All these long months I have resolved to see him this once more, and you may kill me, but I cannot go without that. You may stay and hear whatever I say; I do not care if all the world knows that I love him!"

"You do not know what love is," said Denise, looking with a kind of contemptuous pity on the girl, "for you think only of yourself."

"Say what you will—think what you will—you shall not drive me away till he comes. You need not care, for it is the last time. Every one says that I shall die, and I hope it is true. I am so wretched!—Oh, so wretched! But after all, I am nothing at all to him, and you are his wife; I have no right here," she murmured, her mood changing under the influence of Denise's expressive silence. "You could send me away if you were cruel enough. I thought I should be happier if I spoke to him once more—that is all."

"Poor child!"

"I do not want to make you miserable—I never

thought of that. Perhaps it was wrong to come.
Must I go away?"

"It is too late," said Denise, and as she spoke Gaston entered the hall.

They all kept silence for a little while; but Gaston's first impulse was anger against Lucile, struggling, however, with tumultuous feelings of a far different kind. Denise was the first to speak.

"Gaston," she said, trying to steady her voice, "Your cousin wishes to see you. Say what you have to say, Lucile!"

"Stay, Denise," he said. "It can be nothing that you are not to hear!"

She lifted eyes full of anguish and despair, but trust above all.

"I am not afraid, Gaston. I trust you entirely," and as she spoke she glided from his detaining hand. Sense and breath seemed deserting her; she felt as if in another moment she should have fallen upon the floor of the hall. Gaston and Lucile were alone, but the shadow of her presence was between them still.

"Lucile! what madness possessed you?" were his first words.

"Oh, I see that I was mad! I know I was! But you did not come when I wrote, and I waited and waited, and could not bear it. When they said

I was ill, at Marseilles, I was delighted, for then I thought I could go to Costabelle, and see you."

"This is worse than folly, Lucile. Do you suppose I forget that I have Mme. Luchon before me?"

"Do not call me by that name, or I shall hate you, Gaston! Oh, why did you let me go away from here?"

"Why!"

"I should never have gone—I did not care whether you were rich or poor; but I was so frightened by mamma; and you forgot me and married Denise Le Marchand."

"After you married M. Luchon."

"Mamma made me, Gaston!"

"Did she make you write that answer to my letter, in which you said she had convinced you—"

"She declared that if I said I would marry Auguste, it would bring you back to me," said Lucile, pouting. "You did not come; I heard you were to marry Denise; and then I did not care what I did. Besides, I thought that I should be freer when I was married, and you see that, the instant I could, I came to tell you all this."

"Poor girl! it would have been better for you if you had never seen my face!"

"Oh, I know that—I have been so wretched—I would not eat, and the doctor said I was killing

myself, and Auguste did not know what to do ; so his sister, Anaïs, said she would take me to Costabelle."

" Is he kind to you ? "

" I daresay he would be, if I let him. He should have asked me if I liked him before he married me, if he wanted to know ! Though what else could I have done ! And I am more at liberty, especially now that I am with Anaïs—"

" What was your excuse to her for coming here ? "

" I said I should like to see Denise, and made her think we were dear friends ; but, in any case, she would have been ready to please me, for Nina and I know some secrets of hers that she would not like told."

There was a look and tone that made Gaston involuntarily think of Denise, older, and yet so much more innocent than Lucile, who was wise already in a knowledge that was not wisdom.

" My poor child, fate is hard on you !" he said. " Who and what is this Anaïs—what sort of a friend for you ? "

" Oh, I do not know—I do not care ! I thought I should be contented if I could tell you how it all was, cousin ; but now I am only more unhappy, and I must go back !"—and tears showered from her eyes.

"You have brought unhappiness enough here to-day, you foolish child," said Gaston, seeking to harden himself, as he felt himself growing less and less able to keep his first measured tone.

"Oh, cousin, it is cruel to speak to me so!"

"Cruel! Well, grant it, Lucile, you must see that you and I can be nothing henceforward but strangers. You are too childish to know that coming here as you have done——"

"Then you do not love me after all!" she interrupted. "You never loved me! Denise even was kinder than you! You never cared for me! No, not even when you gave me the ring that your mother said no one must wear but the woman you loved! Take it back, then!"—she threw it to him. "Yes, I was wrong to come, though it was only to say farewell—and now it is said!"

"Farewell!" repeated Gaston.

"Is it really so, cousin!" She was again the childish Lucile of old times.

"It must be, my poor girl. You think me hard—Heaven knows if I am, and what you have made me endure. I tell you, Lucile, I dare not meet you again. Child that you are, cannot you see that you are on the edge of a precipice? All the laws of God and man are set between us; but they might be no safeguard for you if I saw you again, and knew that I had only to say the word

and you would follow me to the world's end ! Do not try to understand me—Lucile, my Lucile—for the last time—farewell !”

He clasped her close to him one moment, and the next put her from him. “For the last time ! the last !—I shall never see you again, then ?” she whispered amid her sobs, but he dared not hear—he saw Nina waiting on the terrace without, and called to her to come to her mistress. And thus, blinded by tears, Lucile left Château Farnoux for the last time.



CHAPTER XXXII.

WHEN Gaston sought Denise he found her sitting as she had sat for an hour past, perfectly still and unoccupied ; but he might have heard her heart beating as she looked up and held out her hand to him. A few agitated words passed between them ; he thanked her for her generous trust in him, and she, looking at him with mournful earnest eyes, answered, “I am glad of this, if it has comforted you at all, Gaston.”

He smiled at the words ; he felt so very far from anything like comfort !

“ I ought perhaps to have told you all this long ago,” he said, “ but I believed it gone by for ever.”

“ Tell me whatever you like now.”

“ It is a short story after all. I loved Lucile ; I could not marry her—my uncle’s will rendered it impossible.”

And then he recollect ed that by marrying as that will had directed he had retained Château Farnoux.

Before their marriage he would have told her this without hesitation ; now it seemed out of the question, though mercenary motives had had small share in what he did.

“ That poor child consented to marry her cousin, young Luchon, willingly, as I believed—unwillingly, as she now says. It seems that she submitted at first, and has rebelled ever since rebellion has become useless. There is nothing to be said—she had not realised how entirely she had separated herself from me—her coming here to-day was a frantic act, only to be excused by her childishness——” he stopped short, then added hastily—“ Denise, I feel that I did you a great wrong in marrying you !”

“ I would not have it altered, Gaston.”

“ No, at least I can give you a name and a home, though I know now how poor a gift it is. It seems idle to tell you that you have my entire esteem and regard. I am glad now to know that you did not marry me for love, my poor Denise, though at the time I was unreasonable enough to think it wrong ! As if I myself—Well, let that pass. There is no mystery between us now ; you know all there is to know, and you must have patience with me. I am bad company to myself and others sometimes.”

“ Gaston—it is not quite for my own sake—but you and Lucile——?”

"We shall never meet again."

"Thank you."

Inconsistent as it might be, just when he had convinced himself and her that they could never be more than friends, he was ready to reproach her for enduring this trial to her feelings as a wife so patiently. He found in it a new proof of her complete indifference to him; but a suspicion that she had a heart worth winning was dawning upon him, and his thoughts ended in, "We are at least friends, Denise? I could not spare your friendship. It is a stronghold to me!"

"Yes, friends, always; there is nothing that I would not do if you wished it," she answered, choking back her sobs.

He pressed her hand, and said, "I do believe there never lived any one so good and sincere as yourself. I have learnt it more and more clearly of late; you have changed this old place into a 'home,' as they say in England. You have brought new life, too, to my poor aunt. What should we do without you?"

Her head was bent so that he could not see her face, but a great scalding tear fell on the hand that held hers.

"Denise! My dear Denise——?"

"Are you trying to make yourself believe I am necessary to you, Gaston?"

" You are, my dear wife, you have grown very precious to me ; we have learned to know each other better of late, have we not ? Do you think I hold it a trifling blessing to have a friend and companion to share my life, whom I respect and trust entirely ? "

But still there was one thing wanting ! Love was absent. Kind, indeed, oh, always kind—how should she bear it ? Years of happiness would hardly have compensated for the anguish that rushed upon her when Gaston left her. She felt that now she knew whatever there was to be known, and she did not doubt his promise to see Lucile no more ; but there was no consolation in that or any other thought. How should she maintain this tone of quiet affection all through the long future, while her heart felt breaking ? how endure her daily occupations, while the very daylight was hateful to her !

" Can no one be happy in this Château !" she exclaimed. " Oh, why did I ever come to Farnoux !" and yet she had truly said that she would not undo her marriage if she could.

Little did Gaston imagine that Denise was more to be pitied than himself ; he watched her with solicitude for a while ; but, seeing her placid, and occupied as usual, he was satisfied that she was contented. She was far less timid with him than before ; for now she hoped for nothing, and he did

not guess what passed out of his sight. Mlle. Le Marchand, away in Normandy, thought not, as she triumphed over the success of her castle-building, that her romance had turned to tragedy; and as little did Lucile know, while she struggled vainly against her lot, that she had caused Denise to suffer ten times more than she could do. Yet Denise would live, and Lucile would die. Mental pain does not kill as quickly as bodily, or there would be no complaint of over-population; but it sometimes combines with lurking malady, and is fatal. When Denise heard Lucile say she was dying, she looked at the eyes and cheeks bright with fever, and did not believe it in the least. Perhaps Lucile only half believed it herself. Though too much afraid of her mother to make an effectual resistance before her marriage with M. Luchon, she seemed since to have entirely changed her character, and, strong in her position as a married woman, set Mme. de Farnoux at defiance; and young Luchon little liking his mother-in-law, she abandoned the home that she had looked forward to, and retired to solitary lodgings where she bewailed the ingratitude of her child, in perfect good faith, as an injured mother. As for Auguste Luchon, Lucile treated him with a sullen petulance that soon disgusted him and sent him back to the courses from which matrimony was to have weaned him. She openly

professed to hate him, and said she only cared for one thing, and that was to die; and she exposed her health in every way, while her whole mind was secretly set on meeting Gaston again. Poor Lucile! brought up by a mother and a servant, in their different ways equally unprincipled, to baffle superior strength by cunning had been the only lesson she had ever learnt; and after all, in spite of this evil influence, she was still little more than a simple child, hardly comprehending wrong, and misled chiefly from not knowing what right was. She had carefully hidden her resolution to see Gaston again from all but Nina, who encouraged her in it, partly to obtain power over her, partly from love of a little excitement. Lucile had no plan, except to meet and speak to him; she never considered what would happen next. When she had first found herself really ill, she had secretly rejoiced, and declared that nothing would cure her but country air; only she would not be nursed by her mother; she must have her married sister-in-law, Mme. Cambel. For reasons of her own Mme. Cambel consented, and young Luchon was glad to get rid of Lucile for a while. Accordingly to Costabelle, where the Luchons had a house, they came, and remained till Mme. Cambel grew tired of her exile from Marseilles, and frequent arguments arose as to whether they should or should not go back.

The two were sitting together ; Lucile now on a sofa, now moving restlessly about ; the sister-in-law at work, looking impatient and out of temper.

"Go if you will, Anaïs ; I stay here," said Lucile.

"But I cannot leave you here. What an idea ! What would my brother say ? he has already twice summoned you back, and if you delay he will certainly come himself, and then there will be a scene!"

"Yes, he will come and behave like a brute."

"He has a horrible temper, I allow ; I shrink when that savage look comes—he would kill any one of whom he was jealous, I am certain. These men are dreadful——"

"All, my dear?"

"Ah, well, there are exceptions," smiled Mme. Cambel. "But we will not talk about the naughty creatures."

"Not if you do as I wish ; otherwise I may talk more than you like."

"You would try the patience of a saint, Lucile. I cannot imagine what attracts you in this place. As for me, I am never in the country three days without being perfectly miserable. I was certainly born with a natural antipathy to the country."

"People go there when they cannot pay their debts in the town, I think."

There was some sting in the allusion to debts that made Mme. Cambel turn pale and frown. Lucile added: "You know very well that you had better keep on good terms with me, and then perhaps I may help in your affairs."

"If I only knew what you want here! When you came back from Château Farnoux so *défaite* and *bouleversée*, I thought"—Mme. Cambel looked meaningly at her—"I thought I could guess what *anguille il y avait sous roche*; but nothing has come of it. I know you have not received so much as a message."

"You know!" cried Lucile, with flashing eyes.

"Ah, yes, I know. My dear, I am responsible for you to Auguste, and as long as you place no confidence in me——"

Lucile hesitated. She had Mme. Cambel too completely in her power to fear her; for the lady had been deceived by her apparent childishness, and had talked imprudently before her. She would make no revelations to her brother. But, low as Lucile's standard of moral feeling was, she had been so far raised by her love for Gaston as to shrink from speaking of it to such ears as those which were awaiting her tale. "When I have anything to say," she answered, shrugging her shoulders.

"You look innocent as a dove, but yet I don't

know, my dear," said Mme. Cambel, incredulously.

Lucile walked about the room, pulled a rose to pieces, lifted and threw down her knitting. A sound of a horse galloping in the road caught her ear; she flushed red, and ran to the window. Mme. Cambel watched her with greedy eyes. The sounds were soon lost in distance, and Lucile turned round, pale, with her hand at her side.

"Always thus when she hears a sound! I would give my little finger to know if it is M. de Farnoux whom she expects! Who did you think it was, my dear?"

"No one . . . Oh, Anaïs!"

"What is it? Heavens! how strange you look! You suffer?"

"Yes—here—Oh, I cannot bear this pain!"

"Nina, Nina, quick, my salts here! Lucile, do not look so strangely!"

"I am better now. Oh, how horrible pain is!"

"I believe after all her illness is a fact!" said Mme. Cambel.



CHAPTER XXXIII.



HERE are many who call on death to deliver them from present distress, who would be the first to shrink back if he replied to their summons. They realize their present sufferings more vividly than the terrors of the great king. It was so with Lucile. As soon as she grew really alarmed about her health, she consented to go back to Marseilles, but its glare and dust and summer heat, and the pestiferous smells from the harbour, increased her illness so rapidly, that the physician advised her return to Costabelle. M. Luchon found himself unable to quit business and pleasure to attend on an invalid wife, who made no secret of her dislike to his presence; Mme. Cambel was too much afraid of consumption to come near her; and thus it became necessary to make advances to Mme. de Farnoux, and propose that she should come and nurse her daughter.

There is a mournful little song called "La Poitrinaire," of which the burden is, "Je suis si jeune, je ne veux pas mourir." Such was

ever Lucile's cry. Nothing could be sadder than her terrified clinging to life, and the horror of death which she manifested ; not that life had many attractions for her, but she had not one thought to make the passage of the dark river from which all mortals shrink, less awful to her. If she knew anything of religion, it was in its most formal sense ; she found no support in it now. She looked from face to face continually, watching what they thought of her state, as if supplicating to be told there was no danger. At times she would break out into passionate reproaches against her mother, or call on Gaston to come to her, and cure her with the touch of his hand. “Send for Gaston—Oh, why did he say he would not come !” was always on her lips. She never reproached him ; all her bitterness was for her mother. Love for Gaston had been, and was to the last, her truest, most elevated feeling. Mme. de Farnoux deserved some pity at this time. Brought face to face with death, obliged to watch his slow approach, and endure all the melancholy thoughts that were her special abhorrence—never was penance more complete. Her only idea of soothing an invalid was by denying that there was anything to fear. Sad, indeed, is the sick bed that has no better nurse than Mme. de Farnoux ! The maid Nina was kind and faithful, and the curé who lived near found out the dying

girl, and did his best to bring her spiritual consolation ; but, like most curés of remote districts, he was little above the peasants of his flock, either in birth or education, and her case perplexed him. Never did little white “bastide,” amid its trees, look gayer than the Luchon house at Costabelle, and never was there sadder scene than that within its walls, where this young life was beating itself to pieces. Lucile, after all, did not wish to live, but she dared not die.

Gaston heard that she had left Costabelle, and heard too that she had been brought back. He learnt it accidentally from Mme. Pitre one day, when she was at Château Farnoux. “Such a pretty creature!” said she, sadly; “and only seventeen years old. It is very young to die!”

He had promised himself and Denise never to see Lucile again, but his promise did not extend to hearing no tidings of her at such a time. An hour or two later he was asking at Costabelle what truth there was in what Mme. Pitre had said. Nina’s tearful answer confirmed what he had heard. He did not enter the house, or see Mme. de Farnoux, but he lingered near for a long time, looking at the window which he had learnt was Lucile’s. She did not fail to hear of his coming, and the knowledge seemed for a while to bring actual life with it. “He will come again!” she exclaimed; and

day after day rallied her strength to sit at the window, and watch, unseen, through the Venetian blinds, for his visits. Strange to say, this seemed to content her. In these last days of life she only needed to feel that he still loved her ; and the kind-hearted curé did not quite forbid this weakness, but sought to turn it to account, when he bade her think of Paradise, where all tears would be dried and all jealousies cease. When he spoke thus, she listened with something of the same docility that she used to show to Gaston, even in her most wilful moods ; and perhaps the simple teaching suited her, for more than once she said, “I hope Denise is not very unhappy now,” with something of repentance, but she would never call her either Mme. de Farnoux or “Gaston’s wife,” though the curé urged it on her, as a token of her sincere resignation. He could, however, deal much more easily with Lucile, who, as life ebbed, became more and more tractable, than with her mother, whose petulant lamentations demanded reproof rather than sympathy.

Denise knew that soon Lucile would be but a memory to Gaston, but she was not tempted to rejoice. She saw well that Lucile dead, was more to be dreaded than Lucile living. Had she lived, she would probably have accepted her lot sooner or later, and even become reconciled to it, and Gaston

would have seen in her only the wife of Auguste Luchon ; but now she would remain for ever a beautiful vision, his first love, with an aureole round her head. Denise knew it by instinct, but at this moment she almost forgot her own burden, in the compassion that she felt for Lucile, and the intensity of her desire to comfort Gaston. Not a word had passed between them on any but common-place subjects since Lucile's visit to the Château ; but Denise could read Gaston's face too well for her own peace. She could not but shrink, as if she had touched a fresh wound, when she thought it possible he might meet Lucile again ; and yet the rumours brought by Mme. Pitre moved her compassion so much, that she would have done almost anything to comfort the dying girl. At last she took courage, and went herself to Costabelle, to ascertain her state. Mme. de Farnoux came to answer her inquiries in person.

“ Oh, how kind of you to come, dear madame ! ” cried she, little knowing, however, *how* kind it was. “ You find me broken-hearted ; my sweet child . . . and I believed I should have a happy home with her for the rest of my life ! I am a most unfortunate woman. To think that, when a poor mother has had all the anxiety of bringing up and marrying a child, she should lose her ! The poor thing suffers from the heat to that degree—

impossible to relieve her—it kills me to see her. Only a mother could understand what I undergo, and after all, it is in vain ! She has heard you are here, and insists on seeing you, but it is asking too much !”

Denise had scarcely counted on this, and hesitated.

“ Oh, you are so amiable, I know you will not refuse her. Anything we can I think we ought to do to gratify her, whatever it costs our feelings.”

Had Denise been inclined, she might have remarked that in this case it was not Mme. de Farnoux who sacrificed her feelings. She did not, however; she only followed her silently to the room, where Lucile was lying by the open window, shaded from the sun by its *persiennes*. Her light hair was loose, and lay in thick masses on her pillow ; her eyes were closed, and for a moment she did not open them as Denise stood beside her. She was as lovely as ever ; her fair cheek as rounded, her hands as white and dimpled as of old, and the eyes that she lifted at last to Denise were clear and star-like, but her voice was changed ; its husky sound told of a throat parched with fever.

“ How many times, Denise, have I seen you ?” she asked.

“ Three.”

"Three besides this? Once in the chapel, and once in the hall—the other?"

Denise could hardly force herself to say that their first meeting had been in the cemetery of Farnoux. The word sent a cold thrill through her, and Lucile shuddered visibly.

"Why have you come to see me?" she asked, wonderingly.

"I heard you were very ill, and—"

"Do you want me to die? You will not have to wait long," said Lucile, more sadly than bitterly.

Denise knelt down by her side; she could only answer by tears. Lucile drew away the hand that Denise had pressed over her eyes, and laid a burning cheek upon it.

"Are you really sorry for me? No one else will care, except—Oh, I know *he* will. Does he, Denise?"

"Yes, dear child, you know that."

"Yes, I know, but I like to be certain of it. I want him to remember me. You will let him, Denise?"

Poor Denise! She answered by a tender caress, not daring to speak, lest she should lose her self-control, for this tried her hard.

"I like your hand; it feels like his. The Baron used to say that all the De Farnoux had taper

fingers, like these, and you are a De Farnoux, they say. I shall shut my eyes and fancy I am at the Château. Oh, I was so happy there! I wish I were a little *verdon*, and lived in those ilex woods. Ah, I recollect so well the day he gave me the ring—”

She relapsed into silence. Presently the rustle of a silk dress roused her. “That is mamma,” said she, with impatience. “I hate that rustle. Please go away.”

“But, my dear child, you are detaining this kind visitor an unreasonable time; her carriage is waiting in the heat, and you know she will have a long walk from the last point to which a carriage——”

“What does it matter? I was happy for a minute, and so you—No, I ought not to speak so. M. le Curé told me it was very wrong. That is another sin to confess. Oh, do not go; stay, oh, if you would stay! Remain and nurse me; I think I should sleep at night if you were here; I should think there was an angel in the room, you look so gentle and kind, and then mamma need not sleep in that chair and fancy she is watching me.”

“My darling Lucile!” exclaimed Mme. de Farnoux, reproachfully.

But Lucile’s entreaties only grew more piteous, and ended in such convulsive weeping that all were greatly alarmed, and hailed with relief the entrance

of her doctor. He made a sign to Denise not to oppose her, and she gradually became quiet again. Denise wrote a few words to tell Gaston where she was; and, when she had sent them, remembered that this was the first time she had ever written to him. She learnt from the doctor that her task could not be a long one. A few days at most would see the end of the struggle, but it might yet be a very painful one. As she watched over Lucile, she seemed to enter into the love, at once tender and passionate, with which she had inspired Gaston. All that was faulty, all that could have repelled Denise, had vanished from Lucile's character; Denise saw in her only the clinging child, whom she, so far stronger, would fain have taken in her arms, and sheltered from every wind. In these last days Lucile turned to her as if she had been all that her life had wanted—sister, companion, friend—Denise brought the protection and peace that she had craved for in the beginning of her illness. Mme. de Farnoux and her selfish grief did not disturb them; she kept aloof, displeased that Denise should be all-sufficient to Lucile, yet well satisfied to escape distress and fatigue herself. From one unexpected quarter Denise met with true gratitude. Auguste Luchon showed a kinder and a kinder feeling towards Lucile when he came from time to time to visit her, that made Denise believe that, had

he had a different wife he might, after all, have become an estimable man, and made her happy. But with poor Lucile all had gone ill from the outset. Had such fond care as Denise gave come sooner, it might have saved the brief life that was fading so fast. Each day Denise went to the garden gate to give her report to Gaston, and each day some new sign had appeared that told how near the end was. He never asked to see Lucile, nor did she appear to desire that he should come to her. Denise always told her when he had come and gone; and she smiled and was contented. To Denise the look or word of thanks that Gaston gave her was strength for the whole day.

“Denise, I am not afraid now that it has come. You have made me not afraid,” whispered Lucile.

They both knew what it was that she meant had come, and both knew that this last trial would very soon be over. The offices of the Church of Rome for the dying had been performed, for every one had thought in the afternoon that she could not live out an hour. Yet she had revived again, and the curé was praying near. Denise was sitting holding her hand, or putting back the hair from her damp brow. Mme. de Farnoux, now really overcome, was sobbing in the next room. A little lamp in the window was flickering and fading; no one thought of replenishing the oil. Fit emblem of the young life

now ending, thought Gaston as he watched in the garden below. He had stood outside Lucile's door all that afternoon, but the doctor had declared that any emotion must be instantly fatal to her, and he dared not enter, nor did she know he was there.

Lucile sought to speak again, but voice seemed gone. Denise leant over her, and fancied she heard her gasp: "But *I should like* to have seen him again!"

The poor child had been told by the curé that this desire was sinful, and must be offered up as a sacrifice of self-will; and she, not to the last comprehending why it should be a sin, had nevertheless obeyed; but now, half unconsciously, the long-suppressed wish escaped her. Denise rose up softly, went to the window, and signed to Gaston. The night was clear and balmy; stars were scattered over all the sky. There might be a soul further off than they ere long. Before the thought had well passed through her mind Gaston was at the door; she went to him, spoke a few low words, and led him to the bed-side. Lucile lay as if in profound sleep, only sleep was never so still and waxen. And a deep sighing wind came up through the pine-wood. The curé rose from his knees. "She is at rest!" he said. Denise clasped Gaston's hand, but he, throwing himself beside the bed, exclaimed,

“Lucile! my Lucile! come back to me! Speak to me this once more, Lucile!”

At the very gates of the grave she heard that voice. Her eyelids unclosed once more; her blue eyes sought his face; a smile of perfect happiness came on her lips, and with that look on her face Lucile died.



CHAPTER XXXIV.

Mlle. Le Marchand's little property in Normandy was situated in one of the most fertile of the valleys that border the sea near Avranches. Green slopes sheltered it; rich meadows extended down to the shore; roses climbed the walls of the farmhouse; poultry scratched and clucked in the farm-yard, and a pair of great tawny oxen went out to plough under the guardianship of the honest labourer, who, with his wife, cultivated the land for Mlle. Le Marchand. She paid them unexpected visits from time to time, and examined the condition of her farm with a shrewdness that would have altered Mme. Pitre's opinion of her, could she but have known it; but she seldom stayed long. She had never forgiven the little property for having "come too late," as she said; and, when in the neighbourhood, she spent most of her time in some public gardens, little frequented by others, belonging to the town that crowned the hill above her farm. There she would sit and meditate, or

sketch undisturbed. She was not a social creature, and used to say that she had inherited a shyness of mankind from her Huguenot forefathers, who dwelt in caves of the earth, and were hunted like wild beasts.

Therefore the solitude of these gardens pleased her, and above all, the view from them, which was full of the pale dreamy poetry of the north, and deeply tinged, too, with northern melancholy. From the foot of the green slopes stretched wide shining sands, over which hung a faint mist, so that no one could say where they met the line of grey sea, out of which, blue and distant, like a vision, rose Mont St.-Michel. She would sit and watch the tide creep over those treacherous sands, where, every year, thirty or forty lives are lost, and recall the legends of the country-side, muse on old times, or listen unobserved to the chatter of the "collégiens" from some neighbouring school, who used to come and lie on the grass under the trees, and play each other tricks, while pretending to learn their tasks. They all knew her by sight, and rather liked the sharp words she occasionally threw them ; they never molested her nor she them. Several months after Denise's marriage, Mlle. Le Marchand was sitting in these gardens, where there was not another creature except a nursemaid, whose fingers were moving rapidly

over her lace cushion, while two children played near.

Mlle. Le Marchand had a theory that young married people should be left to themselves for a year or so, undisturbed by relations, and she was carrying out her theory by keeping away from Farnoux. She would hardly, however, have remained as long as she had done in Normandy, had not the wish to paint the view from these gardens taken hold of her, and occupied her thoughts. She had not begun even a first sketch yet, for she always pondered a subject long before commencing; and to tie herself down definitively to a new work, required a great effort of mind. She always regretted when she put the last touch to an old one, and shrank from beginning a fresh one; once begun, however, she devoted her whole time and thoughts to it, looking on it with a kind of reverence, and sparing no labour to bring it to perfection.

She had no pencil in her hand on this afternoon; yet her projected picture was occupying her mind, as she turned the leaves of a little old Bible from a Rochelle press, and sought a passage that she wanted. A sprig of the peculiar lavender that perfumes the hills of Provence marked it.

"Here it is!" said she, half aloud. "I always liked to read how the two Hebrews were inspired with special powers to make beautiful the sanctuary.

Neither head nor hand can work without the gift. You have not lost your scent, little mark. There's something in this fragrance that gives me the idea of freedom ; a wild fresh odour from the mountains ; and that's why I put it in an old Huguenot Bible. It always sets me longing for the south. Is it not extraordinary that I can't live anywhere else ? I should soon hate this green land, though there's poetry in that view. Mournful enough, too ; and this northern sun is pallid, and all the colour has gone out of the sky into the flax blossoms. Yes, I love those calcined rocks of Provence better than these woods—I wonder why ? ”

She was turning half unconsciously through her little Bible, as she meditated, and presently came to the last page, where was an index to the Psalms, very significant of the epoch when it was composed.

“ Clement Marot’s Psalms,” said she ; “ here they are, music and all ; the same airs to which Catherine de Medici and her ladies used to sing them, when they were the fashion at the court ! But they were not in favour there when this index was compiled. No ! they were being sung then to the echoes of the Esperon and the Algoal, in ‘ the Desert.’ ‘ *Quand l’église sera affligée de calomnies et de force ; Si empêchée en l’exer-*

cice de la religion ; ‘ Si forcée de venir au combat.’ To be sure ! Our Church was planted with tears and watered with blood, and built up with lives ; it ought to stand firm. What can be the reason, that now we are become like the Laodiceans, neither cold nor warm ? Or cold outright, I might say ! There’s something lacking ! ”

She shook her head, and was some minutes before she continued her soliloquy. “ I was brought up to read my Bible—a chapter every day, besides what my father read before the evening prayer ; but somehow I got out of the good habit. The child brought it back to me. I liked those days long ago at Paris ; I knew the best of the Encyclopaedia school—what the Revolution had left of them. People who were used to discuss everything in heaven and earth, but with good manners. Yet I learnt little good among them. Here is the Catechism that Antoine and I used to say every Sunday to my father, as we had no temple and no *pasteur* near. ‘ *Quelle est la principale fin de la vie humaine ?* ’ ‘ *Et quel est le souverain bien des hommes ?* ’ I think I can hear his voice asking these questions, and little Antoine looking at me to be prompted. Curious how those days come back to me ! I think it is because Denise seems to belong to them. I was growing a mere heathen, I

believe; but the child brought the old thoughts again. There are not many people that I respect; and I always think they stand upright, because they have not yet got into a slippery place; but I do believe in Denise. I should mightily like to see her again, and have a tilt with her husband, but young married people should be left alone to learn each other. Poor creatures! it's often sad rubbish that they have to learn. The child was always asking me to come, in her first letters, but lately she has said nothing about it, and there's a tone I don't make out—”

Mlle. Le Marchand took a letter from her pocket and read it through.

“I don't like it. I can't make it out. Her letters used to be full of her pressoirs and lavoirs, and all the different kinds of olives, and what sort of grape did best on their ground, and so on. And Gaston's book, that which she expected to be a *chef-d'œuvre*, and his correspondence about it with this man and that in Paris, and Berne, and Berlin, and I don't know where. Then she must needs go off to nurse that poor Lucile Gautier—ah, pretty creature, I little thought, when I was so huffed with you at Château Farnoux for patronising Denise, that she would smooth your death-bed within a year. I wonder whether those blue eyes of yours ever knew tears! They looked

as if such things were altogether strangers to them!"

And, perhaps without knowing it, she hummed an old song of a neighbouring district :—

“ ‘ La beauté, à quoi sert elle,
Légèrement, belle hirondelle,
Légèrement ?
Elle sert à porter en bière,
Légèrement, blanche bergère,
Légèrement.’

“ And then she has had Mlle. de Farnoux on her hands ill—very sad, I daresay, but I still can't understand the tone of this letter.—‘ I think I did not know how happy I was with you at Farnoux ; it was like dwelling by the waters of Siloam that go softly.’—People never begin to be grateful for past happiness while they are well contented with the present. The shadow of Château Farnoux is on the child ! And then would any one believe that she finds a subject of thanksgiving in Mademoiselle's living on ! Most people would say she had lived a good deal too long already. And then, again—Ah, there are those little vagabonds coming here ; they see me. I can see you grinning, you young rogues ! I wonder if I should be a happier woman if I had one of them for my own ? Bah ! if a niece is so much anxiety, what would a son be ? Besides, he would grow up, and

I should lose the child-face that was all mine. It's only the dead faces that keep the child look; and after all, when we meet them again, who knows how even they will be changed! Come, this won't do; I'm getting sentimental. What's that you are saying, you little *polisson*, there? Planning to go down to the *grèves* and catch crabs? Oh, you little reprobate, I'll report you to your schoolmaster, and ask him to give you a *pensum*."

"Then you shall have nothing of what we should have caught!" laughed the boys.

"Much obliged. I see you caricaturing me on that blank leaf; you, sir! Two can play at that. Look here"—and her pencil was in her hand directly. "Give me the book—there—that's your likeness—" and she threw back so exact a resemblance to the lad, only that the head was set on the body of a crayfish, that all the boys burst into a shout of delight.

"Listen to me," said she, with unmoved gravity, "especially you, M. l'Ecrevisse. Do you know that on the 2nd of November, every year, there rises from the sands—"

"A fog!"

"Ay, a great white fog; but you don't know of what it is composed, *hein*? Of all the souls of all the people who ever were *ensablés*, and there are so many, so many, that all the *grève* is covered

as far as Mont St.-Michel. And there you would find the spirits of a great many little boys, who went on half-holidays to fish without leave."

She departed with a solemn gesture, but turned before she left the gardens to look back at the laughing boys, and observed to herself, "Now I know that if I had a son he would be the very first to go crab-catching, and I should be in constant terror about his precious life; and yet I never can see a pack of rosy children without a pain at my heart. Empty things ought to feel light; but it's not thus with hearts, I find. Who knows whether Denise will ever need me again? Well, if I had had a child of my own it would have been grown up by this time, and I should have been a grandmother. Any how, I've escaped that dispensation. Grandmothers are always simpletons; I've lived too long to give into such nonsense. There's no denying, however, that a grandchild is the natural consolation of old age. Perhaps Denise may have a child—bah! I'm fancying her my daughter now! It's decreed that I shall only know life's best feelings in a sort of second-hand way. I don't suppose I really feel for her as a mother would. I'm only her aunt. But, after all, no one loves that child a little—people are either indifferent to her or else they adore her—it's a curious fact. I have a great mind to pay the child a visit—and there are

those old letters that I want to find. Of course she does not want me, but still——”

The next day would probably have seen her going southwards, had she not received another letter from Denise, which said she was going to Aix for a few days. Mlle. Le Marchand went a walking tour into Brittany, to work off her restlessness, and when she returned set to work on her new painting, in which she became so much absorbed that she allowed the weeks to slip by without thinking of returning to Farnoux.



CHAPTER XXXV.



DENISE had, indeed, only exchanged one sad scene for another. A few weeks after Lucile's death, Mlle. de Farnoux's illness increased so fast that her moments seemed numbered. Yet she lingered on, knowing no one now but Denise and Gaston, and never contented unless one or the other were near. Gaston saw Denise become thin and pale, and noted that her face grew daily sadder, and he would have prevented her from wearing herself out in this long watch; but there was no one to take her place, and she repulsed his anxious care with impatience such as she had never shown before; impatience born of the heart-ache, that grew more intolerable every day. For now the whole burden of her lot had fallen upon her, and she became completely hopeless of ever winning from her husband more than the doubtful affection, which at times she longed to fling far away, as a mere mockery of what ought to have been hers. His very care for her angered her, when he attributed

to her attendance on Mlle. de Farnoux the sadness which sprang from a far different source. One smile or caress from him would have borne her through hours tenfold more gloomy than any that she could spend by her sick-bed ; and he never guessed it ! What chance had she of pleasing one who had loved Lucile, so beautiful, so unlike herself!—and Denise looked at her own sad face in the glass, and “ He never would have loved me, even if he had known me first ! ” was her bitter thought. “ Why should he ? ”

Nor would she ever have been Gaston’s first love. Some fair child-like creature, like Lucile, was sure to have been his ideal. When *oldened* by sorrow he might feel the deep spell that Denise possessed for the few who appreciated her at all ; but this could not be while his heart was in Lucile’s grave. He had sought, as far as man could, to put away the thought of her while she lived ; but she was all-powerful now, and Denise knew it well. That he was full of gratitude for her care of Lucile she also knew ; it had made a bond between them, and Denise had learnt to feel too gently towards the girl, whose passage to the grave she had lightened, to be jealous of her now. Jealous she could not be, but she would gladly have changed places with her. “ Even in Paradise,” so ran her thought, “ Lucile will stand nearer to him than I ;

for he loved her!" That Denise was wretched could not long remain hidden from Gaston, though he did not guess the true reason. The fact broke upon him as they watched together by Mlle. de Farnoux at the worst crisis of her illness, and sought in vain to relieve her. Gaston said, "This cannot last," and then suddenly Denise's self-control broke down, and she hid her face on the pillow, exclaiming, "Oh, aunt! oh, dear aunt! I cannot let you die! No one in all the world needs me but you!"

The words reached the dulled mind of the invalid; she looked at Gaston, and uttered his name hoarsely. He made no answer. His eyes were opened then to see that his wife was miserable; but at the time it simply embittered him. Lucile in her grave, Denise so wretched that she clung to Mlle. de Farnoux as her sole consolation—better than he had enlisted at five sous a day, and gone to serve in Algeria than this. He saw that he had made a terrible mistake in supposing that he could satisfy her, as Marcellin had said, with a name and a ring—he had nothing else to give, and neither he nor she could be free any more till death came.

When, contrary to all expectation, Mlle. de Farnoux rallied again, Denise seemed so worn out that he assumed authority over her, and took her to Aix for a change of scene. He would not own to

himself that he saw her unwillingly among the Duvals, who welcomed her as they would have done a near relation. She had no other friends, and Marcellin was safe in the counting-house at Marseilles. Gaston only remained a day or two, and then returned to the Château; nominally because Mlle. de Farnoux could not be left entirely to the care of servants. Denise returned more like her old self, but she would have done better not to go; for, in her absence, Gaston had reverted to his old solitary habits, and was slow to change them again. He had grown hard towards himself and others; and there seemed a tacit understanding that he and Denise should lead separate lives. She submitted, for she had no hope. She might have had courage to strive against a living rival, but she had none against the dead love. Gaston had wondered how her religious faith would endure contact with the world. In these dark hours, whose anguish she never told, that faith did sometimes waver, though only for a moment, as she looked round the world for love, and, finding none, was tempted to doubt whether it existed even in Heaven. He had never imagined such a trial as this; he had thought of the world's teaching, of life's mysteries, and of all the problems and temptations that beset a man. Her woman's trial was different; but, if she could now—as she did—end

by saying, with clasped hands, “I cannot see light, but I know that it exists,” then nothing would ever shake the convictions that had struck root so deep.

She was enough of a De Farnoux to be very sensitive to all melancholy influences; and there were tendencies of character that might have made her as hopeless and hard as Mlle. de Farnoux herself; but with Denise, personal suffering had the effect of making her shrinkingly anxious to console or protect others; and this was her best resource at that time. Judging Gaston by herself, she longed for anything that would re-awaken his interest in every-day life; yet she dared not intrude idle matters upon him. The insight he had given her into his heart made her afterwards feel as if it were presumption to call upon him to be interested in her schemes. She cared little enough about them herself, and let the days go by monotonously, trying to bear the weight of each as it came, without thinking of the next.

At last came Gaston’s first effort to rouse himself. Lucile’s death had stunned him, and long after he had continued his old occupations without a shade of real interest. He felt at last that an entire change of thought was absolutely necessary to him. This he could not have in Château Farnoux, and a reason for going away was offered by the impossibility of completing his notes on the journals

of Philippe and Raymond de Farnoux, without consulting documents preserved in public libraries of France and Switzerland. When he told this to Denise, she brightened and exclaimed, "Then it will be necessary to go to Paris?"

"Yes, and to Berne; possibly I may have to examine a manuscript of Antoine Court's at Geneva, too; I am not certain."

"When did you think of going?"

"I should like to be in Paris next week. It will be necessary to consult a publisher, too; and I am by no means sure how far the censorship will interfere with a book of this kind."

"Gaston, you will take me with you?"

"To Paris, at this time of the year, little *provinciale*, when every one who has a Château is thankful to go there?"

"As if I cared for that!"

"But when I spoke of residing in Paris you would not hear of it."

"That was different. Take me, *mon ami*."

"I will if you so much desire it, but another time would be more convenient."

She saw that she was forcing herself upon him, and was silent in deep mortification.

"The fact is," he added with an effort, "I want a change. I cannot endure my life here any longer; I am only a burden to you and myself. This

journey will give me exactly what I need ; I shall come back another man, *ma bonne amie*. But you know I cannot leave you alone here, and if you are afraid of having the sole care of our poor aunt, tell me so frankly."

"No, I am not afraid of that."

"Will you invite Camille and Adrienne Duval to visit you ?"

"There would be a hundred difficulties about their coming."

"I will see to that."

"I do not want them."

"That is different ; I imagined you were great friends. Your aunt, then, Mlle. Le Marchand ; it is strangely long since you have seen her, why not ask her ?"

"Not for worlds !"

Gaston looked much surprised. "Well, then, is there any one else ?" he asked.

"No one. I would rather be alone."

He combated this till she answered hastily ; and then, without giving him time to say more, she went away. He understood her less than ever, but, at any rate, he was glad to have cleared the way so far. The thought of absence from Château Farnoux for an uncertain time, was like awaking to new life. Denise said no more about it, but accepted his approaching departure as a settled

thing, and listened, when he told her what he purposed, with what seemed indifference. There are, however, one class of people in a household who are rarely deceived, however well their masters and mistresses may act their parts. Zon had long before remarked to her fellow-servants that most ladies loved their husbands in a tranquil, friendly manner, but madame loved monsieur *d'amour*, and her resolution was taken to prevent his leaving Château Farnoux. The night before he went, the mistral sobbed stormily round the Château; rain poured down, the sea lashed the shore, and yet at times there were sudden lulls, in which all was so still that the ear was strained to catch the renewal of sound. Denise could not sleep; she spent this night, as she had done but too many of late, walking up and down her room, or kneeling at the window, watching dawn creep up the sky. In the early morning as she looked out she saw, to her astonishment, Zon coming towards the Château, struggling against the angry wind, her garments almost torn off her, and her broad beaver hat blown upright on her head. Denise went downstairs to demand what this meant, and encountered her dripping wet, with her hands full of herbs.

“ Oh, madame! is it you? ” said she, much discomposed, and visibly at fault for some explanation

which should not be the true one. “Have you wanted me?”

“Where have you been at this hour? and in such weather!”

“Eh! bonne mère quel ventarou (great wind) there is outside! I have been seeking *mourguettes*,” and she held out several corpulent snails, as evidence of the truth of what she said.

“*Mourguettes*? And what are these herbs?”

“Oh, they are something for grandmother. They must be gathered at day-break, or they have no power.”

“Zon, you know you promised you would always tell me the truth.”

“And so it is—at least, not exactly, for the herbs are, after all, not for grandmother. Madame will not be displeased? Well, then, she knows how learned grandmother is in herbs; she collects them for distilling.”

“I have met her gathering them in the hills.”

“There! Madame sees that I am telling the truth. People think that grandmother knows how to *escounjar*—call up storms, I mean—and to enable conscripts to draw a good number; but that is all nonsense. There is, however, one thing that she really does know; I could not go to her till yesterday to ask about it, but I assure you she is infallible in this. These are herbs to make a love-

charm ; look, this is immortelle, and this rosemary, and this we call by a patois name that madame would not know ; mixed together, they make a wonderful drink. Grandmother gave me one for Manoële, and madame herself knows how faithful he has been these three months.”

“ As far as you know, my poor Zon. Well, I have promised you your white crown when you require it, and monsieur will add a gold chain.”

“ Madame !”

A gold chain is the highest ambition of the peasant girl.

“ Oh, madame and monsieur are too good ! and I shall have a *clavier*, too, to hang to my apron with the best of them ! Grandmother may well say it is a fine thing to serve the De Farnoux.”

“ But since Manoële is so satisfactory, what do you want these herbs for ?”

“ It is not for him, madame. Oh, indeed there is nothing wrong in it ; I have said a *capelé* (rosary) every night and morning for this, and a litany to the saints besides ; but if to make sure, madame would let me brew this drink, and put a little in monsieur’s coffee, he would never go from Farnoux !”

“ Monsieur’s coffee ! What folly, Zon ! M. de Farnoux is only going on a journey of business. And, if I could keep him, I would not owe it

to—" she perceived that she was speaking her thoughts aloud, and stopped herself.

"Then madame will not try?" said Zon, greatly disappointed. "Yet she sees how it has succeeded with Manoële. It must be as she pleases."

"Even Zon can see how little he cares for me!" thought poor Denise, as she braced herself up to bid him good-bye calmly. He was shaking off his Farnoux look, she thought, even at the mere prospect of going away. Both met with the same outward tranquillity, and only a few minutes passed between their morning greeting and their adieu. Gaston had, as usual, breakfasted in his own apartment, and Denise could guess that he had wished to shorten the parting as much as possible.

"Good bye, *ma chère amie*," said he, kissing her forehead. "Write to me."

She made no answer, but inwardly wondered if he remembered what was the sole occasion on which she had written to him before.

"Good bye!" he repeated, "recollect I advise you to invite the Duvals—"

She shook her head and drew back. He made a good-natured sign of farewell to the servants, who were assembled to see him start, all, except Zon, glad of a little excitement in their daily life—sprang on his horse, and rode away. Denise, from the terrace, could see him for some minutes appear

and disappear down the winding-path. At the last turn from which he could see her, he looked back once more, and waved his hand. Then she went indoors and sat down, and crushed her hands together in dumb despair. Just so had the uncle of Gaston gone away, to escape from a loveless home. When would Gaston come back? She did not shed tears; they had all been poured out in the darkness of night. Had she wept or complained the agony had been sooner over, but that was not her nature. She and despair did mute battle together. In half-an-hour or so she rose up, and went to see Mlle. de Farnoux, and superintended her household as usual; but that grim fight had left its traces, and the servants started and looked at each other, as they caught sight of her face, and there was an awe-struck tone in the voices that answered her quiet orders.



CHAPTER XXXVI.



O weary was Denise with the tumult of feeling in which, for some time, she had been living, that the first few days of solitude were positive relief; and her chief sensation, a desire never to feel grief or joy any more. But with Gaston's first letter the unquiet heart began to throb again. The details of the letter, its fullness—for Gaston could write to her much more easily than he could talk—roused the craving for somewhat more substantial, and the loneliness of the Château weighed upon her more each day. She had never before known what it was to be nervous; but now, as soon as evening came, she found herself starting at every sound, looking fearfully round as if, like Zon, she had expected to see the ghosts of those starved monks—concerning whom the Château had a legend—gazing in through the dim window-panes. Her task of attendance on Mlle. de Farnoux was far from cheering; society, had she had spirit enough to desire it, could only be attained by an effort;

and when she sat alone, her thoughts were ever occupied with the short period which, to her, had seemed the whole of life. Gaston had gone away to escape from that concentration of thought; in a like case Mlle. Le Marchand had done the same; but for Denise, as for Mlle. de Farnoux, no escape was possible; these two had had no choice but to sit still, and drink of a well of bitterness, into whose depths no prophet came to cast a bough of healing.

Had Gaston had a suspicion of her feelings, he would never have left her. Zon said "Madame will die!" but Denise was strong and young; yet it was well that an event at last occurred to break the terrible monotony of her life; and this was the arrival of Mlle. Le Marchand. She had not written to say she was coming; her arrival was made known to Denise by a voice outside the *salon* exclaiming, "Announce me! You will want to announce that I am come in the *Aigle Farnousien* next, I suppose! Don't be ridiculous! Madame knows me, and I know her, and I know my way, too. Get along, get along! Denise, where are you?" and in came Mlle. Le Marchand, and in a moment Denise was sobbing on her breast.

"Why, Denise, Denise, child, if you *are* sorry to see me, you need not show it so plainly! Come, come, let me look at you—stand up—child, child,

what has happened, that you cling to me as if you had not another friend ? I would far rather have really found myself unwelcome, than had such a greeting as this !”

“ It is nothing,” said Denise, frightened at her own emotion, “ only I have been alone some time, and—”

“ Ay, I know that my nephew-in-law has gone away and left you with the *grands-flambés*, and all the other butterflies up here. Gone to England, eh ?”

“ Yes, there were papers that he required in the possession of M. Farnoux, in Suffolk, and he also had to visit a *pasteur* in London, who wrote and said he had information that would be useful. But how did you know he had gone to England ? From Mme. Pitre ?”

“ Another friend. I stopped a day in Marseilles.”

“ Marcellin !” cried Denise, with a light in her eyes. “ Did he say he was coming here ?”

“ Quite the contrary. What ! is it such a disappointment ?”

“ Oh, sunshine comes and goes with Marcellin.”

“ Hum !” said Mlle. Le Marchand. “ Denise !” she added, suddenly, “ Why are not you and your husband happy ?”

A vivid colour dyed the cheeks of Denise ; pride

prompted a denial, but the pain was too sharp ; her lips quivered, and she was mute.

"So the sunshine of your home depends on Marcellin Duval?"

"Aunt, if you knew what it is to have some one that you *can* please!"

Mlle. Le Marchand replied by a sharp "Hum!"

"Some one with whom one is at ease ! to whom one can give pain or pleasure ! Oh, if—if—"

Had she ended her sentence it would have been, "If my husband loved me even as much as Marcellin does !" but womanly pride checked her.

"Denise, Denise, that feeling may lead you far!"

"Where can it lead me ?" she answered in surprise ; then, catching her aunt's meaning, "Do you think such a thing possible ?" she cried, with an indignant gesture and scarlet cheeks. "I ! Gaston's wife ! As if any woman could give her love to Gaston and take it back !"

"Ah, did you love him when you married ?"

"As much as he did me," answered Denise ; pride quenched in sudden tears. "Aunt, aunt, why did you come and make me say all this ? I thought at least I had courage to be silent !"

"It is no disgrace to love one's husband—in the country. We are not at Paris, you know. Why did you let him go away ?"

"How could I help it? And perhaps it may make him happier."

"And you love him, eh? You need not answer—and you know how to love, too! '*La puissance d'aimer est une puissance de souffrir'*'—too true! So I have come back to learn this?"

"It is a poor welcome for you, dear aunt."

"Once upon a time," said Mlle. Le Marchand, disregarding the attempt to release her from her bonnet and shawl, "there was a nation who worshipped an idol. They set it up on a costly throne, and brought it offerings of their best treasures, gold and tears, and hearts too, if you will believe me, and knelt at its feet, while it stood high above them, deaf and dumb all the time. Poor things! they wanted a missionary sadly! But it strikes me most of us do much the same now-a-days! Oh, child, after all, be thankful—you are young, and heaven and earth are kind to youth. You have at least got an idol without a flaw—you have not awoke, as I did, one morning to find out that it was made after all of—very common clay! And then the shrine was empty; and there's nothing so melancholy as an empty shrine!"

"'Paths that I have not known,'" murmured Denise. "The way is hard sometimes! But, aunt, do not talk any more of this; let me be glad

that you have come. Did you come here at once, or stay in the town at all?"

"Oh, I visited my den, and saw Pitre; why, the little woman is positively growing fat! She tells me she is laying by money for her old age!"

"She will never be old," said Denise, smiling; "but laying by money out of twenty francs a month!—and with the little cadeaux that she is always giving—impossible!"

"My dear, till lately she had but twelve francs a month to meet all expenses! How can you make her toil up here, eh? Ah, she was full of the glory of giving lessons at Château Farnoux, and she spoke quite lovingly of the *goûter* she finds ready for her!"

"Imagine that she used never to breakfast on anything but bread and a glass of water!"

"Oh, well, I have done that myself."

"Yes, but you do it for choice, while she——"

"True, she enjoys good things when they come. What a little merry grasshopper it is! No storms in that life—no sentiment there!"

"Do not tell her so, aunt, for she once said to me, 'By nature I am romantic, very romantic; had it pleased Heaven to place me in a position to indulge in it, I should have been a heroine.'"

"And so you have actually called on that old scandal-monger, Mlle. Legrand!"

"Did you not hear that she had lost her mother? I thought she must be so lonely, and I called; and, indeed, there seems a great deal of good in her, though she is bitter and harsh."

"Trouble will not make you so, child, I can see. You did very right; I hear she was much pleased by your visit, and even has a good word for Mme. de Farnoux!"

Mlle. Le Marchand made no further attempt to win her niece's confidence, though she remained some days at the Château, allowing herself to be waited on and attended to, and making Denise conduct her to old familiar spots in the environs. Once Denise found her standing in thought in the little theatre, long disused, the scene of much mirth in former years. For the first time Denise obtained a glimpse of her aunt's history, and some explanation of the deep personal grudge that she owed Mlle. de Farnoux.

"Yes, he acted Elmore with me," said she, "that one and only time that I appeared in this theatre. He was a very gay young noble, my dear; people thought he came for Mademoiselle—I knew better. And yet what did I know! He was *fiancé* all the time to a cousin in Touraine; but he did not tell me that—no! He was a scoundrel, but I found it out in time. Mademoiselle looked on. She was far too grand to suppose there could

be anything between one of my degree and his. She saw, and would not deign to see. She let me drift on. No thanks to her that I learnt his baseness. Some people would have spoken as woman to woman—not she, my dear!"

And that was the first and last allusion that Denise ever heard her aunt make to this part of her history.

After ten days or so, she grew visibly restless, and announced that she should go back to Maison Rocca. Denise strove to persuade her to remain, but vainly. "I am going, perverse child. If you had wanted me you might have asked me here before. You did not, you know!"

"From no lack of love, aunt!"

"Bah! I know it. I have my reasons for going; I hate this place, and its master will soon be home, and he must not find the 'old vivandière' here. Yes, he called me so once. My dear, what is the use of denying it? you never heard it till now. Oh, never mind how I know! my little finger told me. I am not going away on that account; he and I are the best of friends. He will come back, and a new life will begin for you. You, too, have paid a heavy price to bear the Farnoux name—"

"Yes, youth, and hope, and all that makes life worth having!" thought Denise.

"Never grudge it; I would rather see you think no price too heavy to pay to be Gaston's wife, than hear you say you could as soon have married Marcellin Duval as Gaston."

"When did I ever say so?"

"I dreamed it, perhaps," said Mlle. Le Marchand, smiling to see how entirely Denise had forgotten it, and how impossible such indifference seemed to her now.

"Don't lose hope, my child."

"I have none. I know now how soldiers feel after a lost battle. Oh, life is very cruel! Yet I ought not to say that; it *must* be for the best—if I can but wait patiently I know I shall be satisfied. But *when*?"

"Satisfied—yes," said Mlle. Le Marchand, reluctantly—"but, child, we must learn to be satisfied in God's way, not ours."

Denise covered her face. When she raised it from her hands they were bathed in tears, but her trustful look had returned.

"How strange that that should seem hard, when one knows it is the only real way! I will try to be patient, dear aunt."

"Patient! I am the right person to preach to you, to be sure! Well, let that go. Tell your husband I have found something for him that he will think worth its weight in gold—those letters

from Madeleine Le Marchand when she was in prison."

"Oh, how glad I am!"

"I thought of you at each line I read, child."

"But, aunt, it is impossible that you can remember her?"

"Not so impossible as you think, child. I am more than seventy years old, you know. I was born just when the persecutions were coming to an end, and the Revolution beginning to growl, though nobody understood its voice. However, in fact, it's her daughter that I remember, just the mother over again, I have heard; and she used to talk of Madeleine till I fancied I knew her. Well, let me go. There, one kiss is enough!"

When some space lay between her and the Château, she stood and looked back with a long wistful gaze, yearning to send a blessing to the niece, whom, in her strange fashion, she loved so well. Unwonted moisture dimmed her eyes.

"I would give all I have to make that child happy!" said she, "and I cannot raise a finger to do it. No, not if I gave my life. The old story! Wasted love, wasted lives, opportunities gone for ever . . . what does it all mean? Problems, problems! My old Encyclopedists could not solve them—my *pasteur* friends just as little! So those last called them sinful temptations. I am sick of

doubts—sick of doubts ! If I could but see Denise happy, I should have faith in life again. There are better things than happiness, but it helps life along marvellously. ‘Die not, O mine ass ; the spring comes, and with it clover.’ She shall be happy ! Now then, where’s a crayon—let’s have done with human matters—where’s a tuft of pimpernel ? Ah, I see you, my little beauty, one last purple blossom—what a colour ! We put our own present feelings into most things, even stones, but we can’t into flowers ; they will not look grey, or sad, or whatever suits our mood of the minute ; they keep their own loveliness, and that’s why men —poets especially—care so little about them ; egotists that we all are !”



CHAPTER XXXVII.

DENISE had brightened during the unexpected visit of her aunt, who contrived to leave with her a sensation of hope and expectation ; but as days passed without a single new event, and Gaston's business seemed likely to last for months, solitude began again to sink down overwhelmingly upon her, and expectation died into dull despair. There were times when the pain of mind was so great, that she could almost have thrown herself from the highest cliff near Farnoux ; or she would wander restlessly about, snatching courage from suffering, and believing that the very intensity of it proved that it could not last. Oftener, utter heart-sickness fell upon her, as she thought of the long life to be spent with a husband who did not love her, or desire her to love him. She did not murmur ; to submit, and silence all repining was her one anchor, at times when her old child-like trust in Providence seemed dulled or dead ; and yet a bitter cry would rise to her lips she knew not how, and she would

find herself saying, “*Lover and friend hast thou put away from me;*” and then resolutely stop herself, and resolve—all in vain—to think no more. She suspected that she must be falling ill, so great became the effort of maintaining her cheerfulness before the servants or Mme. Pitre, or of interesting herself in anything; and Mlle. Le Marchand, when she came to see her, looked graver and graver, and went away each time more fully persuaded that whatever were the trials of a spinster, they were more tolerable than those of an unhappy wife. It became more difficult to answer Gaston’s letters; she seemed to have less and less to say to him; but from the tone of his she might have divined that change of scene, and an occupation in which he was enthusiastically interested, were doing their work. She tried to be glad, but it all seemed tending to separate them more.

“If monsieur delays much longer, he will have to return to madame’s funeral!” exclaimed Zon, again and again; and Denise began hardly to have energy enough either to smile or to reprimand her.

“Now madame is sitting by Mademoiselle, and then in monsieur’s library, among books as old as Herod; it was more amusing for her in Maison Rocca than here! Would she come out and see Goutoun and me catch larks? It is very entertaining; perhaps she would hold the looking-glass,

and I will have the net ready? She used sometimes to do so with Mme. Rocca, and me, and M. Rocca."

In fact, lark-catching was a favourite recreation on a Sunday with M. Rocca, and Denise had found great amusement in watching him; but Zon's well-meant proposal now fell to the ground.

"Nothing will do but monsieur's return!" said she to the other servants, more numerous than in the Baron's time. "Goutoun! you and I will go to Ste.-Agnesca's chapel and pray for it, and if that does not do, I'll vow a silver heart to Nôtre Dame des Pêcheurs down in the town, for his return."

Goutoun objected, that madame being a Protestant, Ste.-Agnesca and Nôtre Dame could not be expected to interest themselves in her, but Zon silenced this in high indignation.

"That is her misfortune, poor thing! They know that, well enough. Everybody has not the luck to be born *catholique*. And if ever there was a saint, it is madame. See how she attends on Mademoiselle—how she visits the sick—how she loves her husband! Go and get the *thon* ready for dinner, and don't talk nonsense!"

After all, the pilgrimage was not needed, and Zon triumphantly appealed to this as a proof of the truth of what she had said, and she hung up the silver heart before the image of the Virgin in pure

gratitude; for Gaston came home as unexpectedly as had Mlle. Le Marchand.

He had been five months absent, when he again set foot in Farnoux; five months filled with new thoughts, new scenes—how far had they changed his view of the life to which he was returning?

Grey stood the Château against the pale blue winter sky; the sea sparkled and danced, and the bay was full of fishing-boats. The town, amidst its olive-woods, seemed drinking in the light; pungent scents from the aromatic mountain-herbs were wafted away by the fresh breeze. But for the bare net-work of boughs that a fig-tree, or plane, or micocoulier, raised here and there, no one could have guessed that it was winter. Gaston dismounted from his horse, and walked slowly up the rocky way. The air grew fresher and more perfumed as he ascended; odours, imperceptible in the valleys whence they rose, mingled with the keen scent of lavender and rosemary; the ground grew more and more rocky—the Château was now close by. Gaston quickened his steps, put his horse into the stable, and entered the house. All was still, except a hum of servants' voices in some distant quarter.

Unseen he mounted to the boudoir, which Denise had modernised and appropriated. He entered,

and saw his wife before him, but a wife much altered from the one he had left. He stood looking with startled surprise at the forlorn change that he saw there. All unconscious who was near, she lay with closed eyes on a sofa ; her attitude spoke of utter dejection and listlessness, and one tear after another stealing slowly down her cheeks dropped on her pillow as if she were too tired and languid to dry them. Her look of weary sadness contrasted strangely with the careful decoration of the room ; the bouquet on the table, winter though it was, the blooming jardinière, and the wreath of corona Christi round a quaint mirror. But this was Thérézon's loving thought, and Denise had not even noticed them. A movement of Gaston's, as he stood looking at her, roused her ; she put her hand instinctively over her eyes to hide the tears, and said "What is it, Zon ? I said no one must disturb me again—" then, looking up, she saw her husband. Uttering his name with a cry of joy, she started up and held out her arms, while her face lighted up with joy ; but the next instant she drew back in painful confusion, and murmured, "I was so surprised—when did you come ?"

He saw she was afraid to welcome him too warmly. She had overstepped the boundaries that he had set between them. A light flashed on him which seemed to project a radiance over all his future life.

"So you are glad to see me!" he said, with a kiss, as he sat down beside her.

"Yes."

"And I am very glad to come home, Denise!"

She looked up in undisguised surprise and incredulity.

"Have you been ill?" he asked, marking the wan look which her fitful colour could not hide, and the thinness of the cold tremulous hand that lay in his.

"Oh, it is nothing. And I have had my aunt to take care of me."

"That was well!"

"Oh, it was such a pleasure; only—she would not stay!"

"Now, Denise, you must tell me why, if it was such a pleasure, you refused to invite her when I left you. It could surely have been from no idle fancy that I should dislike it?"

"I cannot tell you, Gaston."

"Nay, you will. Yes! because I wish it!"

"That is a very unfair plea!" said Denise, laughing and blushing, "only its rarity is in its favour." The smile passed from her lips, however, and she added, with manifest effort, "My aunt is so keen-sighted; I thought she might think . . . might fancy . . . that I . . . that we . . . were not happy together."

“And that was your reason?”

“Yes.”

“Not, then, that Mme. de Farnoux was ashamed of a bourgeois aunt?”

“Gaston! you could not have thought that!”

“I am heartily ashamed if I did, my dear Denise.”

“You really thought so?” she repeated, deeply mortified.

“Forgive me, Denise!” and as she looked up she met a smile such as had never beamed for her before; and, in the thrill that it sent through her, the former pang was forgotten.

There was a silence while Gaston studied her face.

“Denise—tell me one thing more—have you been very unhappy?”

But that question came too home; recalled too vividly all that had come and gone. She started up and went to her jardinière, leaning over it with a struggle to regain composure that could not escape Gaston.

“There!” she said, coming back presently with a rose, and ignoring what had just passed—“You can have seen nothing more charming, even in England, where they adore flowers. But stay, you must be hungry and thirsty after your journey, let me——”

"No, no, come back and sit down, and you shall hear my adventures, if you care to hear——"

She answered by a glance that made him put his arm round her, and draw her to rest against him. He had come back resolved to break down the icy barrier between them ; duty and some sharp anxiety had led him home ; but, in this meeting with Denise, tenderness was awaking at last, and love itself might one day fold his rainbow-wings by Gaston's hearth. This wife, neglected, needing care so much, unable to hide her joy at his return, was another than the Denise whom he had hitherto had no heart to comprehend.

"You know how my business prospered in Paris," he said, looking down on her bent face ; "and, besides succeeding in my literary affairs, I think I ascertained that the new dynasty is likely to need the support of the Protestants, and will probably follow in the steps of the First Napoleon in giving them their civil rights. I can foresee a probability of a political career being opened to me, Denise, that may cause us to spend more of the year in Paris than we thought of doing. But I promise that Château Farnoux shall be our home. Will that content you ?"

"Quite," she answered ; and there were few things that would not have contented her, as she heard in each tone of Gaston's voice how entirely

he had recovered from the depression that had weighed him down.

“ I did not stay long, you know, in Paris. I found myself in no mood for life there. I wanted to escape from myself, and only succeeded in being bad company for others. Then came that fruitless search in the library of Berne, and the more successful one at Geneva, where, also, I got indications of further intelligence to be had from M. Tourneur, in London. Arrived in London, I could do no less than visit the Suffolk Farnoux ; besides, I thought they might have family papers, or traditions, that would fill up that blank in the journal of our ancestor Raymond, which so long perplexed me——”

“ When he was forced to leave the Château ? ”

“ Yes. I suspect that his history during those years must have been entrusted to a separate volume, which is lost. Being in England, you may imagine that I searched out all that I could regarding the refugees ; learnt what manufactures they had established ; heard service in the crypt of Canterbury Cathedral, where it has been held every Sunday since the first little band of fugitives settled in the town. Well, you know all this from my letters——”

“ You were very good to write so often.”

“ And you were good too, at first, but latterly you have used me ill.”

"I had nothing to tell you that I thought you would care to know."

"There is a great deal that I want to know ; but it can wait a while. These Farnoux that I spoke of are settled in the east of England. Thither I bethought me of going, one misty soft day—one would have thought it Holland. You do not know the east of England ?"

"Only London."

"Only London ! Well, imagine something as unlike London streets, with their fierce rush of life, as possible. Imagine broad green marshes, with a slow river gliding through them, and cattle feeding there ; here and there a wide estuary, where laden barges go ; windmills beside it, vast trees, a château on some little eminence, and a spire indicating where the village clusters and the *pasteur* dwells. All silent, verdant, and monotonous — the only sounds, a flight of rooks cawing overhead. A place to drive the Arab spirits of the earth frantic — there are such in all nations — what becomes of them in England ? What did your aunt do there ? I had almost turned and fled ; but I found so cordial a welcome as made Suffolk lovely. There was my relation, the excellent Paul Farnoux — Farnoaks, as they profanely call themselves ! — greyer, older, but cheerful, well occupied ; a man to be seen by his own hearth. I quite misunder-

stood him when we met a year ago in Paris. His wife no longer young, but still the same charming, dignified person, whom I had thought a type of woman and wife years ago ; age had not wearied them of life or of each other ; yet they had had much grief. The daughter, married to a neighbouring squire, was there, with husband and children—all fond, and proud, and cheerful. They understand domestic life in England.”

Denise could not suppress a sigh, for Gaston’s tone was bitter.

“ Well,” he continued, “ this English life seemed all wearisome and tedious to me at first—I confess it—but that feeling did not last. It was real—solid—it stood sun and storm. I had already seen something of it in Switzerland. I grew attracted by this family love that I saw in many homes. These people—they were busy, practical people—they took amusement or happiness gratefully, but they did not make them the business of their lives. They interested me ; and they made me one of themselves ; recalled my former visit ; asked innumerable questions about you, and could not comprehend why I had not brought you, and stood aghast to hear you were alone here. In short, they gave me a picture of what should have been, by taking it for granted that it was. Meanwhile I received this letter.”

He gave it to Denise, who recognised her aunt's writing.

"M. my Nephew-in-law,—If the badger leaves his home, the fox will creep in. Had your ancestors kept ward as slackly as yourself, there had been no De Farnoux in your Château now. Have you left nothing in it worth stealing? I know, from experience, how dangerous characters can spring up on mountain-tops. Oreste, you were much better at home.—Your friend, the Old Vivandière."

Denise looked at Gaston for explanation.

"Nay! I have none to give. I expected to find one when I came home."

"I have none for you."

"In any case, Mlle. Le Marchand was right; I ought not to have left Château Farnoux as I did; and yet, Denise, if I could tell you! No, I cannot tell you the history of these last few months. You have been very generous and forbearing—I have all along felt that."

"Gaston, I always knew that, having loved *her*, you could not love me. I never hoped it, after I knew the truth. I never hoped for more than the friendship that you promised me, and even that seemed failing me at last."

"No—there you are mistaken. Why did I not tell you the whole truth before we married? It

was on my lips, when a word from you drove it back. I did not know you then, and that is my excuse, if I have any. I imagined you viewed the whole matter—as indeed any girl of your age is taught to do in this society of ours—as simply one of course, an affair of business; and I thought, when I had shared my name and rank with you, my part was done.”

“I thought so too, then,” said Denise, with such painful shame, as brought irrepressible tears. “You need not seek any excuse, Gaston. It was just as you say.”

“*Then?*” he repeated. “What brought other feelings, Denise?”

“I began really to know you, and one cannot be always trying to discover how to please a person without learning to care for them.”

“Poor child! Never was any one more misunderstood!”

“But I never knew that I really loved you, Gaston, till that day when little Louis—you know!”

“Yes. Is it possible that on that day! And yet what boundless trust you showed me!”

“It was all that I could do.”

“I little thought.... Denise, I was not worthy of such generous love. The one thing for which I never can thank you enough, brought its own

reward. Lucile—ah, Denise, you want no thanks for watching over her. What would that sick bed have been but for you? I went to hear much that I could not rest without knowing from the *curé*, and all that he said was full of your name. Afterwards . . . Denise, I was not myself then. I was thoroughly wretched—uncertain whether I had not done utterly wrong both by you and Lucile—shipwrecked altogether, as I thought. The bare idea of loving another seemed treason at that time to Lucile. And yet at that very time I must own to a spark of jealousy. Come, as we are making confessions of our sins, I will not say but that your aunt's letter was fuel to flame—I thought but of one explanation.”

“I do not understand,” she said, lifting her head to look at him.

“When I found out at last that you had a heart, Denise, I was terribly afraid that another might have occupied it. I knew well enough that I had taken no pains to secure it myself. You never had such a glad look for me as for one other!”

“Marcellin!” answered Denise, blushing.

“See the guilty conscience!”

“You are as absurd as my aunt, Gaston!”

Gaston started, to find that another had shared his suspicions, but no shadow of doubt could linger before the shy, glad affection of Denise’s eyes. She

viewed all, that had cost him no small uneasiness, as a thing too slight to need reply.

"I never doubted that you were unconscious of danger," said Gaston. "Marcellin the same, only fool-hardy in braving it; but after all, it was chiefly the sense of my own demerits that weighed with me. Marcellin had always appreciated you."

"I knew he liked me, much as he does his sisters, only of course less; and then whether he did or not was such a trifle to me, compared with what you thought! First I knew too little, and then I knew too much."

Gaston recalled her assertion that, though he had no heart to give her, she was content to be his wife. He understood it better now.

"Denise, I do not deserve to ask you anything!"

"Say what you like, except that, Gaston."

"Well, then, do you know that Marcellin once, when I asked him what you and he always found to talk so confidentially about, refused point-blank to say!"

"Did he?" said Denise, unable to hide a smile.

"Will you tell me instead?"

"I think we generally talked of you."

"And what did he find to tell you?"

Denise glanced up into his face, and the smile quivered into tears; but the impulse to answer

frankly was swift and strong. Her voice faltered, but Gaston heard her reply.

"He said you would love me some day," she murmured.

"He knew me better than I did myself," said Gaston.

Zon always attributed Gaston's return to the vow which she had intended to make on the behalf of Denise, and brought forward this proof of her mistress being in favour with Ste.-Agnesca, whenever any one lamented in her hearing that Denise was a Protestant. She never ceased, however, to regret that Denise had refused to try the effect of old Benoîte's love-potion on Gaston, especially when Zon's own faith in it was confirmed by a serious proposal of marriage from the handsome Manoële. Perhaps he was far-sighted enough to calculate future advantages from a marriage with the favourite maid of Mme. de Farnoux, and the event justified his foresight, for Gaston appointed him his *garde-chasse*, thereby transforming him from a poacher to an active and efficient game-keeper, discharging his duties in a manner that showed him to be one of those fortunate mortals who occupy the niche intended for them by nature. Zon is proud of her husband, and sees in her children the future attendants and retainers of the rising generation of De

Farnoux. If she has an ambition still ungratified, it is to become foster-mother to one of Denise's children, and so occupy the position formerly held by her grandmother, towards the family at the Château. Old Benoîte still lives, and since the death of Mlle. de Farnoux has accepted Denise as her liege lady, not quite worthy, perhaps, to rule in the place of her aunt, but still one who will uphold the family honour, and not more degenerate than the younger generation are apt to be in the eyes of those who have known the good old times of those who went before them.

If Zon took all the credit of Gaston's opportune return to herself, so, on the other hand, with perhaps a shade of justice, did Mlle. Le Marchand. She would give no explanation of her mysterious note, but said, "She had told Gaston that he would be much better at home, and he had found it so. She had had her reasons, and good ones too, as women's reasons always were, only men seldom had the sense to find it out." She never precisely ascertained by personal experience what the feelings of a grandmother might be, but no grandmother could be more devoted than she to the little ones who by-and-bye inherited the long silent names of Féline and Géraldine, and chased away with their childish glee all melancholy from Château Farnoux. Mlle. Le Marchand was so capable of rejoicing pro-

foundly in the happiness of others, in spite of her cynicism, that in these latter years her own life became filled with gladness. For Denise was happy. Her look of peace had returned, and a new brightness with it. She had won her husband's heart at last, and won it entirely. Not a chamber in it was shut from her. The esteem and affection that had been growing up for her in his heart, even when it seemed closed against her, had been no ill foundation for a love as true and deep, if less passionate, than that which he had felt in his early youth for Lucile. Never could such happiness as this have been his if he had married the poor child whose loss had caused him such an intensity of regret. This, indeed, he did not know, but he knew himself a very happy man; and when he looked at Denise, in her glad pride of wife and mother, with her last treasure, their boy, in her arms, he acknowledged with deep gratitude that life had greater joys and more enduring blessings than he had ever dreamed possible, when all that made it precious to him seemed buried in the grave of Lucile.

THE END.

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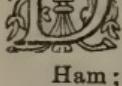
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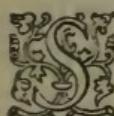
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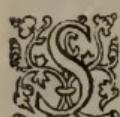
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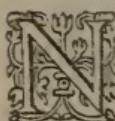
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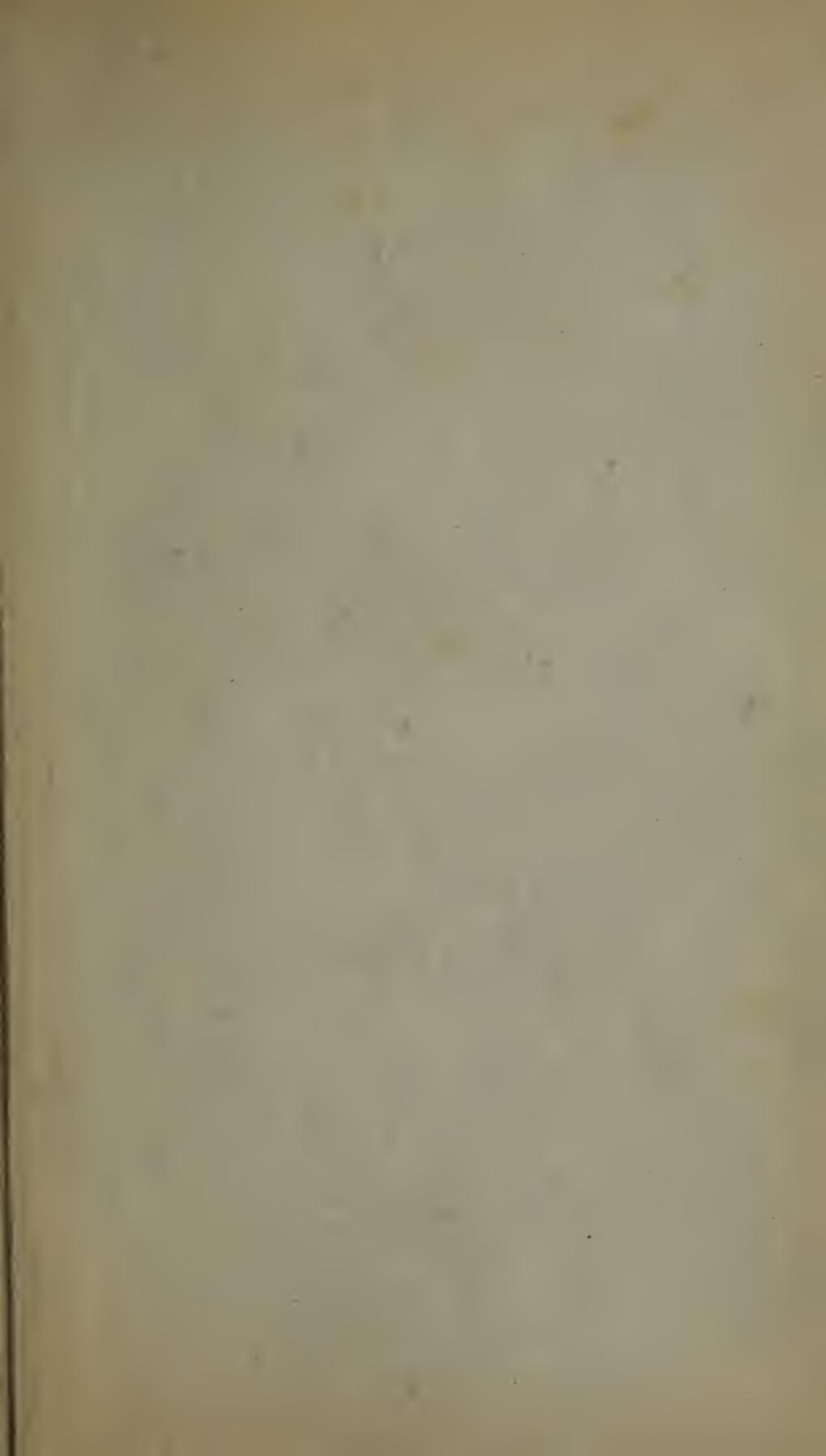
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